JUNE 27, 2005

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RIDING INTO THE SUNSET:
AGING WELL AND HOW WE'LL PAY FOR IT

by WILLIAM GREIDER

azz on a ummer's Day

ROBERT CHRISTGAU ON LLIE HOLIDAY

RIAN MORTON N JAZZ AND HE COLD WAR

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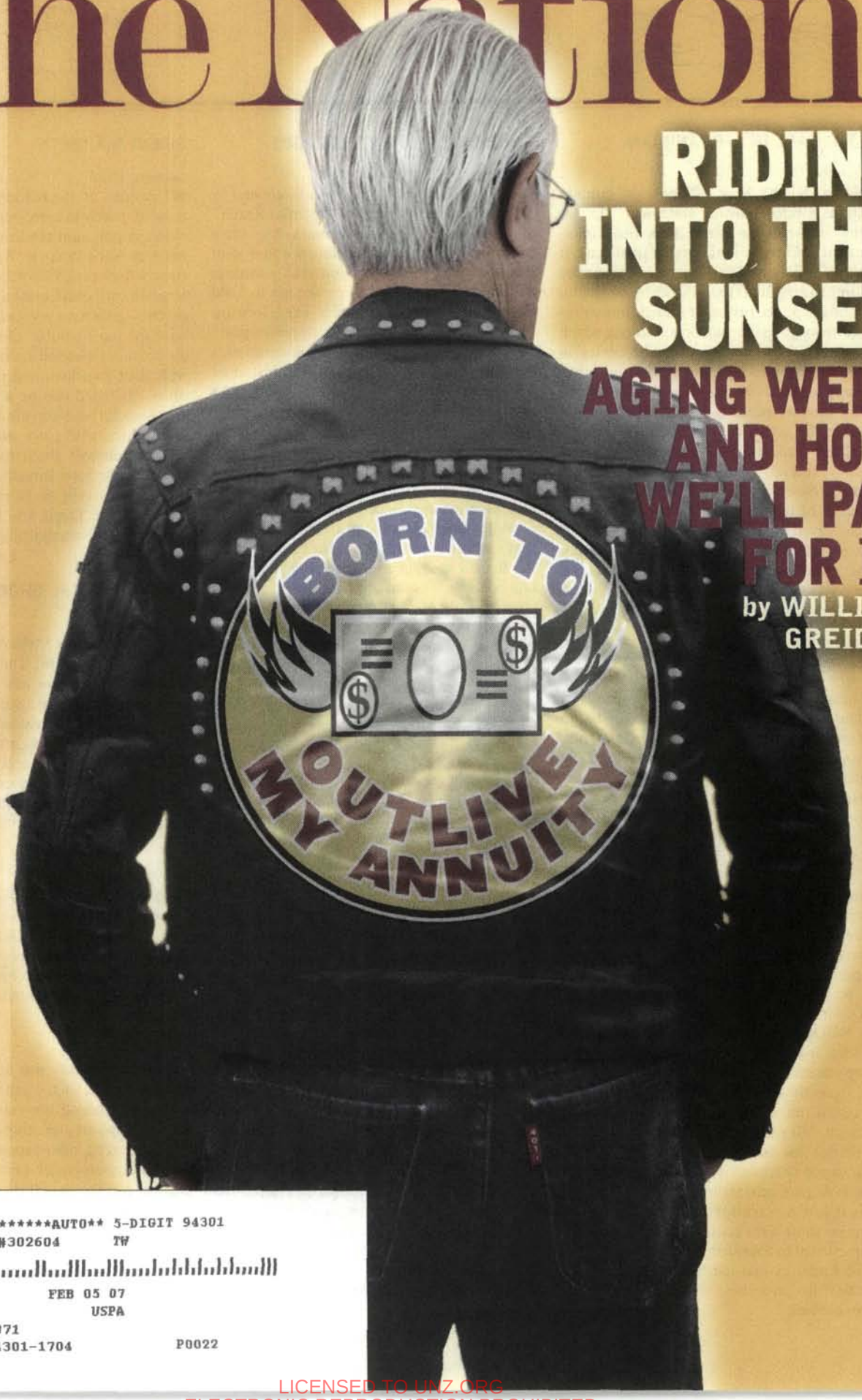
SOMETHING ROTTEN IN OHIO Gore Vidal

EUROPEAN ISLAM AND HE 'WOMAN QUESTION' Deborah Scroggins



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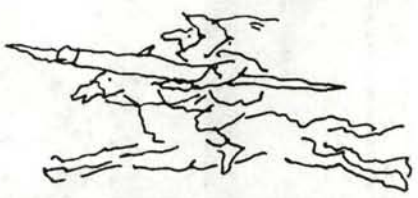

R.O. BLECHMAN

HEALTHCARE IN AFGHANISTAN

Baltimore

■ Naomi Klein's May 2 "Lookout" column contains a mind-blowing statement: "In Afghanistan, where the World Bank also administers the country's aid through a trust fund, it has already managed to privatize healthcare by refusing to give funds to the Ministry of Health to build hospitals. Instead it funnels money directly to nongovernmental organizations, which are running their own private health clinics on three-year contracts." Klein obviously thinks building hospitals would be preferable to providing primary healthcare. Building hospitals to serve the urban elite rather than primary healthcare facilities to serve the rural poor was an early fault of the World Bank and other aid agencies. Now that the bank is finally addressing needs of the rural poor, Klein wants to see money diverted to hospitals to serve the rich and powerful. This casts doubt on the validity of her entire column. TIMOTHY D. BAKER

Professor, international health
Johns Hopkins University

KLEIN REPLIES

Toronto

■ The question of how Afghanistan spends its national healthcare budget should not be up to Timothy Baker, me or any other foreigner; it should be up to a sovereign and accountable Afghan government. Instead, the government of Hamid Karzai—already heavily shaped and influenced by foreign forces—is virtually shut out of all major reconstruction decisions. The *Financial Times* reports that two-thirds of the national budget goes directly from foreign donors into the hands of NGOs and private contractors, bypassing the Afghan government entirely. The real question is not whether aid dollars will be spent on rural clinics or urban hospitals; it is whether any healthcare system will be left behind when the contracts are up and the private contractors leave Afghanistan. The NGOs themselves admit that the current situation is one of total dependence: Acbar, a group presenting eighty large NGOs in Afghanistan, recently said that if foreign contractors were shut out of government reconstruction contracts "all national development programs, including those that focus on health and education, would collapse." Which raises the question: Is Afghanistan really being reconstructed, or is it just a place for foreigners to collect lucrative short-term contracts? The great fear, as articulated by President Karzai's spokesman, Jawed Ludin, is that the billions spent on aid will be "like an iceberg that melts away and leaves nothing." NAOMI KLEIN

GUNBOAT DIPLOMACY CA. 2005

Hempstead, NY

■ As a military historian, I was fascinated by Michael T. Klare's April 25 "Imperial Reach," about future US basing schemes. The same profound arrogance and ignorance that went into dismissing General Shinseki's warnings about the number of troops needed to hold down Iraq is revealed in spades. These forward bases are extremely vulnerable to pre-emption by local groups or revolutionary governments (imagine one of these depots in Pakistan or Venezuela being gobbled up and helping to arm the rebels), and these Stryker Brigades (which an officer friend of mine said the Army is pushing like a new religion) are too small to take on a real adversary (Iran, North Korea) yet too big and bulky to be used in antiterrorist or counterinsurgency contexts.

What these clowns fail to comprehend is that sending in troops is not the equivalent of the British sending a gunboat 100 years ago. Gunboats were a warning not to mess with the international order or threaten foreign nationals or foreign property. Sending in troops means taking over a society and getting stuck running it. America is using the tools of direct colonial rule to impose what it would like to be an informal empire. This just won't work, but Rumsfeld, Cheney and Bush are too ignorant and haughty to get the point. Soon, they will run out of cheap victories, just as they are running out of cheap oil. They will send US troops in over their heads, and the resulting use of massive bombing and perhaps nuclear weapons to bail them out will be as shattering to the international order as it is bloody. JAMES LEVY

Lakeview, Ore.

■ Recently my son in the Navy Seabees reported he might be going to Mali to help set up a base. I confirmed that Mali has no oil, nothing of interest. But west and south lie countries with oil, and just enough strife and "terrorists" to send our military in to "protect" oil interests. OK, that explains Mali.

Michael Klare's article brought even more light to what's going on. As a Vietnam veteran, I was interested when Conoco announced that its highest-producing well, ever, was merrily functioning off the coast of Vietnam. We "lost" in Vietnam thirty years ago, promising democracy, but today, capitalism is winning.

Now we plan to set up troops around the world, invade countries pre-emptively as we wish, and any who challenge us are to be called "terrorists." We again promise people "democracy." The real motive is again capitalism at the point of a gun. Capitalism does not equal freedom. DOUG TROUTMAN

SILENT MAJORITY

Sequim, Wash.

■ I am one of the readers who, as you said, nodded quietly in agreement ["Letters," May 9] with the poignant rendition of Terri Schiavo on your April 18 cover. As a nurse for almost twenty-five years, I have thought about and interacted with death quite a bit. Developmental psychologists have pointed out that those who have the most trouble allowing loved ones to die are those who feel a sense of dissatisfaction with their own lives and relationships. I have often attributed this on a larger scale to religionists who believe in life after death and anti-abortionists who can't allow others to make personal choices about their destiny. I think these people have something in common: an inability to accept the fact that death is simply a part of life. Thank you for the bravery you demonstrated in publishing that cover art.

LAURA SHOWERS, RN

ROOTIN' TOOTIN' SHOOTIN' DEMS

Omak, Wash.

■ Many thanks for Sasha Abramsky's "Democrat Killer?" [April 18]. The sooner those urban Democrats recognize how counterproductive is their shrill diatribe against guns, the better. It detracts from the real issues upon which we should be concentrating and "triggers" a negative response from us rural types—and it plays into the hands of the neocons.

By the way, that's a mighty fine Colt Peacemaker displayed on the title page.

JACK HOLDEN

Portland, Ore.

■ Absolutely right: The left should drop guns as an issue. We will never get anywhere with it, and we lose voters who would vote for us on most other issues. Leave gun matters to the states, and ask the NRA and other groups that favor guns for their input on increasing gun safety. JUDY MELLOW

Havelock, NC

■ Sasha Abramsky was on target concerning the importance of the gun issue to rural swing voters but missed the mark on what Democratic policies are alienating gun owners so badly. The expired assault weapons ban did not cover automatic weapons or military firearms; rather, it restricted the manufacture of new firearms holding more than ten rounds (like the pistol in your local police officer's holster) for the civilian market, as well as civilian rifles, shotguns and handguns with two or more features that gun-haters particularly dislike (such as a

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Cover by Gene Case & Stephen Kling/ Avenging Angels; illustrations by R.O. Blechman and Tim Robinson

EDITORIALS

Surrender at the SEC

The appointment of Representative Christopher Cox to lead the Securities and Exchange Commission is as shameful as sending John Bolton to the United Nations, and should arouse a comparable swell of objections. Cox is a wholly owned agent of the financial and corporate interests the SEC is supposed to regulate. His political career has been financed by the same sectors—banking, accounting, corporate—that produced scandals like Enron and WorldCom. In return, he's worked to shield his patrons from the scrutiny of the government regulators, whom they duped, and the shareholders, whom they swindled.

Bush and his White House are beyond shame, of course. Their "code of honor" is as straightforward as the Mafia's: Always protect ideological kinfolk; always reward monied friends. What's public policy got to do with it? Or a decent respect for public values? The Bush cynics are assuming they can fog this one past Congress without awakening the public. Many Americans were deeply injured by the criminal collaborations of financiers and money-crazed CEOs. Yet the SEC is not well-known, its crucial role in policing Wall Street not widely understood. If the cynics prove correct and Cox is confirmed, replacing resigning chairman William Donaldson, George W. Bush will become an unindicted co-conspirator in this looting.

Bush intends to shut down any further possibility for reform, much to the relief of his patrons in corporate boardrooms and leading banks, plus their propagandists at the Business Roundtable, the US Chamber of Commerce and the editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal*. What scandal? These things happen in capitalism; get over it, losers. The financial-market casino will be open again for business, relieved of the modestly stiffened supervision adopted in law and regulation after the stench of Enron et al. Bring back your savings, suckers, and take another chance.

Donaldson was not exactly a reform tiger but rather a traditionalist Republican and Wall Street blue blood sincerely shocked by the scale and breadth of his industry's dishonesty and grand larceny. So he sided on occasion with the two Democratic commissioners, and they adopted tougher rules for mutual funds and corporate reporting, as well as other measures. After Wall Street titans began a drumbeat of attacks a year ago, Donaldson tried to appease them, stalling on crucial reforms that would have given shareholder institutions like public pension funds greater leverage to curb reckless CEOs. But the dons offed him anyway.

Papering over the greatest set of financial scandals since the 1920s will eventually be ranked among Bush's most destructive accomplishments. Democrats should wake up from their own complicities with high finance and choose the side of popular outrage, discarding the usual bipartisan presumption that members of Congress get an easy ride on confirmation to high positions.

Bush's blatant payback to the corporate and financial guys contradicts all the standard claims of the US financial system: transparency, trustworthy information and markets, and timely accountability to ordinary shareholders, who are said to be the true "owners" of American corporations. It also mocks Bush's own rhetoric about creating an "ownership society": Yes, you can buy and own something called a stock share, but don't imagine that gives you any right to mess with the moguls who run these organizations, or expect reliable facts from them. At great personal expense, a lot of Americans have learned the contrary truth about Wall Street in the past few years. Now they need to turn that knowledge on the "goodfellas" in Washington.

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COMMENT

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Deep Threat

Whatever their motives, Mark (Deep Throat) Felt; Woodstein (Bob and Carl); Judge John Sirica, who refused to accept the notion that the Watergate break-in began and ended with the men arrested inside the Watergate complex (and the two White House aides who recruited them); Senator Sam Ervin, with the battered copy of the US Constitution in his pocket; Senator Howard Baker, who asked what did the President know and when did he know it; John Dean, who did much to answer that question—all of these, and a constitutional process involving a cast of thousands, deserve history's thanks for helping to reveal that something was rotten in President Nixon's Beltway.

Having said that, it behooves us to remember, in the course of today's debate over whether Felt was a hero or a complicated villain, that he had a pre-Watergate history, emblematic of the intelligence agency in which he served as FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's number two: Namely, he helped preside over an agency that systematically engaged in such practices as warrantless wiretaps, breaking and entering, mail intercepts and the photographing of letters, documents, correspondence and minutes of meetings, which targeted not only members of such suspect organizations as the Socialist Workers Party, the Communist Party and the Weather Underground but also their friends and relatives! It was only when these illegal and unconstitutional techniques were brought to bear against the Democratic National Committee that the establishment was bestirred to take the actions that ultimately led to Nixon's downfall.

So while there is much room for congratulation on the self (or family) outing of Deep Throat and all he represented, and for appropriate ruminating on the benefits and problematics of journalists' using anonymous sources, there are even more urgent/ample grounds for cogitation on the underlying lessons for the democratic process of this bizarre episode in our history.

Some years ago, in his magisterial study *The Age of Surveillance*, the late Frank Donner, a frequent contributor to this magazine, documented how in the pre-Watergate years the FBI "twisted history's arm" and won itself a permanent grant of authority to engage in subversive-activities intelligence, a franchise it regularly abused. Nor was the bureau alone in pursuing this pattern of systemic intrusion on liberty in the name of national safety and the use of "intelligence"—in theory, the gathering of information—as an instrument of control. Those same years saw

THIS WEEK ON THE WEB

Abby Aguirre talks with Tim Robbins, who wrote and directed a film of a live performance of his anti–Iraq War play *Embedded* (available on DVD from Netflix), about playwriting, political activism and why the media don't get it. Also, Liza Featherstone says Wal-Mart CEO Lee Scott got it wrong when he recently blamed the company's workers for Wal-Mart's latest travails. At www.thenation.com.

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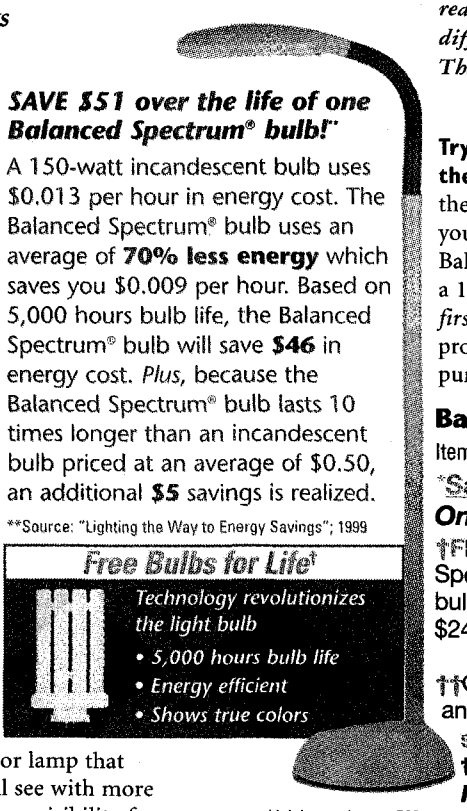

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COMMENT

the CIA exploit countersubversion to discredit the peace movement for political purposes, even as it institutionalized its own illegal domestic surveillance system.

At a moment when Congress is asked to sign a new blank check to the intelligence community in the name of combating the latest threat to national safety (*a k a* the renewal of the USA Patriot Act), it is imperative to acknowledge these radical departures from the democratic process if we are to avoid their recurrence. Speculation on whether Deep Throat is a good guy or a bad guy is fun and games, but ultimately a distraction from this more critical focus. VICTOR NAVASKY

Nation *publisher Victor Navasky's latest book is* A Matter of Opinion.

Something Rotten in Ohio

Outside the oil and gas junta that controls two and a half branches of our government (the half soon to be whole is the judiciary), there was a good deal of envy at the late British election among those Americans who are serious about politics. Little money was spent by the three parties and none for TV advertising. Results were achieved swiftly and cheaply. Best of all, the three party leaders were quizzed sharply and intelligently by ordinary citizens known quaintly as subjects, thanks to the ubiquitous phantom crown so unlike our nuclear-taloned predatory eagle. Although news of foreign countries seldom appears in our tightly censored media (and good news, never), those of us who are addicted to C-SPAN and find it the one truly, if unconsciously, subversive media outlet in these United States are able to observe British politics in full cry.

I say "subversive" not only because C-SPAN is apt to take interesting books seriously but also because its live coverage of the Senate and the House of Representatives is the only look we are ever allowed at the mouthpieces of our masters up close and is, at times, most reflective of a government more and more remote from us, unaccountable and repressive. To watch the righteous old prophet Byrd of West Virginia, the sunny hypocrisy of Biden of Delaware—as I write these hallowed names, I summon up their faces, hear their voices, and I am covered with C-SPAN goose bumps.

At any rate, wondrous C-SPAN has another string to its bow. While some executive was nodding, C-SPAN started showing us Britain's House of Commons during Question Time. This is the only glimpse that most Americans will ever get of how democracy is supposed to work.

These party leaders are pitted against one another in often savage debate on subjects of war and peace, health and education. Then some 600 Members of Parliament are allowed to ask questions of their great chieftains. Years ago the incomparable Dwight Macdonald wrote that any letter to the London *Times* (the Brits are inveterate letter writers on substantive issues) is better written than any editorial in the *New York Times*.

In addition to Question Time, which allows Americans to see how political democracy works, as opposed to our two chambers of lobbyists for corporate America, C-SPAN also showed the three party leaders being interrogated by a cross section of, for the most part, youthful subjects of the phantom crown and presided over by an experienced political journalist. Blair was roughly accused of lying about the legal advice he had received apropos Britain's right to go to war in Iraq for the US oil and gas junta. This BBC live audience asked far more informed and informative questions than the entire US press corps was allowed to ask Bush et al. in our recent election. But Americans are not used to challenging authority in what has been called wartime by a President who has ordered invasions of two countries that have done us no harm and is now planning future wars despite dwindling manpower and lack of money. Blair, for just going along, had to deal with savage, informed questions of a sort that Bush would never answer even if he were competent to do so.

So we have seen what democracy across the water can do. All in all a jarring experience for anyone foolish enough to believe that America is democratic in anything except furiously imprisoning the innocent and joyously electing the guilty. What to do? As a first step, I invite the radicals at C-SPAN who take seriously our Constitution and Bill of Rights to address their attention to the corruption of the presidential election of 2004, particularly in the state of Ohio.

One of the most useful members of the House—currently *the* most useful—is John Conyers, a Michigan Democrat who, in his capacity as ranking minority member of the Judiciary Committee, led the committee's Democratic Congressmen and their staffers into the heart of the American heartland, the Western Reserve; specifically, into the not-so-red state of Ohio, once known as "the mother of Presidents."

He had come to answer the question that the minority of Americans who care about the Republic have been asking since November 2004: "What went wrong in Ohio?" He is too modest to note the difficulties he must have undergone even to assemble this team in the face of the triumphalist Republican Congressional majority, not to mention the unlikely heir to himself, George

CALVIN TRILLIN

WILLIAM DONALDSON IS REPLACED AS CHAIRMAN OF THE SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION BY CHRISTOPHER COX

Though Donaldson came from the Street,
He plainly was policing his beat.
And so they replaced him with Cox.
The henhouse goes back to a fox.

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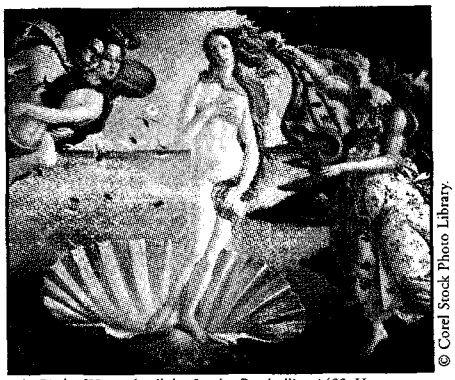

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The Birth of Venus, detail, by Sandro Botticelli, c.1482. Venus, or Aphrodite, is featured in Lecture 11.

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W. Bush, whose original selection by the Supreme Court brought forth many reports on what went wrong in Florida in 2000.

These led to an apology from Associate Justice John Paul Stevens for the behavior of the 5-to-4 majority of the Court in the matter of *Bush v. Gore*. Loser Bush then brought on undeclared wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the greatest deficits in our history and the revelations that the policies of an Administration that—much as Count Dracula fled cloves of garlic—flees all accountability were responsible for the murder and torture of captive men, between 70 percent and 90 percent of whom, by the Pentagon's estimate, had been swept up at random, earning us the hatred of a billion Muslims and the disgust of what is called the civilized world.

Asked to predict who would win in '04, I said that, again, Bush would lose, but I was confident that in the four years between 2000 and 2004 creative propaganda and the fixing of election officials might very well be so perfected as to insure an official victory for Mr. Bush. As Representative Conyers's report, *Preserving Democracy: What Went Wrong in Ohio* (www.house.gov/conyers), shows in great detail, the swing state of Ohio

In Fact . . .

ELLSBERG ON WHISTLEBLOWERS

■ Daniel Ellsberg, who blew the whistle on the Vietnam War, told retired journalist George Beres: "Mark Felt was one of a dozen people who had access to information that the White House was lying. The others need to ask themselves why they weren't Deep Throat." Ellsberg told Beres that what this country needs is more Felts (and Ellsbergs, say we): "We need a whistleblower with official documents to reveal the lies of the incumbent president. To do this, one must be ready to risk career and income and face imprisonment. Had there been someone with the courage to take the risk at the outset, this unnecessary war in Iraq and its terrible costs could have been prevented.... The difference between Richard Nixon of my time and Bush today is that Nixon faced a Democratic House and Senate and a news media that was more liberal, not compliant like today."

CHAIRMAN DEAN: HOW'S HE DOING?

■ David Sirota writes: The Washington "centrists" who continue to attack DNC chairman Howard Dean have succeeded only in unifying a strong contingent of the progressive Democratic base around him. Dean understands that the elites will never be his base of support within the party, so he has an incentive to stay on the populist progressive message. In other words, the grassroots of the party have become crucial to his political survival—and that's scary to the insulated Democratic establishment. For years, insiders have been able to handpick chairmen to make sure the party doesn't move back to its middle-class roots. That explains their anger at him, and their continuing attacks. In a recent speech to party officials in Helena, Montana, Dean went out of his way to stress that the party is a big tent, but he also made clear that he believes the party needs to go in a new, more populist direction. When party insiders go to the media and attack their chairman, as Senator Joseph Biden did after Dean made some sharp-tongued, off-the-cuff remarks about the GOP, they weaken the party as a whole. Can you imagine the Republicans ever doing such a thing?

BANDUNG 2005

■ Damon Rich writes: The governments of the 106 countries of Asia and Africa, with nearly three-quarters of the world's population, met April 22–23 in Jakarta and Bandung, Indonesia. The occasion was the Golden Jubilee of the first Bandung conference in 1955, which drew such heroes of Third World nationalist movements as Jawaharlal Nehru, Kwame Nkrumah, Ho Chi Minh and Sukarno. Against the background of the cold war, the original Bandung conference was seen as a struggle between the US and the USSR for the hearts and minds of the decolonizing world. While the US government refused even to acknowledge the gathering, Representative Adam Clayton Powell Jr., in the May 28, 1955, issue of *The Nation*, observed that "the United States won a victory at Bandung that it did not deserve to win... since the idea of democracy triumphed over the idea of communism." This year the situation was much the same: The United States made no official acknowledgment of the proceedings, while Southern presidents and prime ministers, whatever their private thoughts, cheered the advance of US-led free trade. Nearly fifty years after the founding of the Non-Aligned Movement, nonalignment appears to have given way to integration into the global economy. The phrasing on the hundreds of banners hung around Jakarta and Bandung, borrowed from the lingo of corporate management consulting, said it best: NEW ASIAN-AFRICAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP. While such rhetoric sets an investment-friendly mood, it remains to be seen how the tools of twentieth-century global business can be used to rectify twenty-first-century global inequality.

MAJORITY/MINORITY

■ **Toward the Majority.** Democratic Representative Lynn Woolsey forced a Congressional vote on bipartisan legislation that would have asked George W. Bush to submit a plan to Congress explaining the outlines of an eventual exit strategy from Iraq. With polls showing that a majority of Americans now believe the war was not worth it, the move was designed to put lawmakers on record on the issue of bringing the troops home.

■ **Permanent Minority.** Seventy-nine Democrats—including House minority leader Nancy Pelosi and minority whip Steny Hoyer—voted against Woolsey's legislation, helping to send it down to defeat and preventing it from being a key contrast point between Democrats and Republicans. —DAVID SIROTA

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COMMENT

was carefully set up to deliver an apparent victory for Bush even though Kerry appears to have been the popular winner as well as the valedictorian-that-never-was of the Electoral College.

I urge would-be reformers of our politics as well as of such anachronisms as the Electoral College to read Conyers's valuable guide on how to steal an election once you have in place the supervisor of the state's electoral process: In this case, Ohio Secretary of State Kenneth Blackwell, who orchestrated a famous victory for those who hate democracy (a permanent but passionate minority). The Conyers Report states categorically, "With regards to our factual finding, in brief, we find that there were massive and unprecedented voter irregularities and anomalies in Ohio. In many cases these irregularities were caused by intentional misconduct and illegal behavior, much of it involving Secretary of State Kenneth J. Blackwell, the co-chair of the Bush-Cheney campaign in Ohio." In other words, the Florida 2000 scenario redux, when the chair for Bush/Cheney was also the Secretary of State. Lesson? Always plan ahead for at least four more years.

It is well-known in the United States of Amnesia that not only did Ohio have a considerable number of first-time voters but that Blackwell and his gang, through "the misallocation of voting machines led to unprecedented long lines that disenfranchised scores, if not hundreds of thousands, of predominantly minority and Democratic voters."

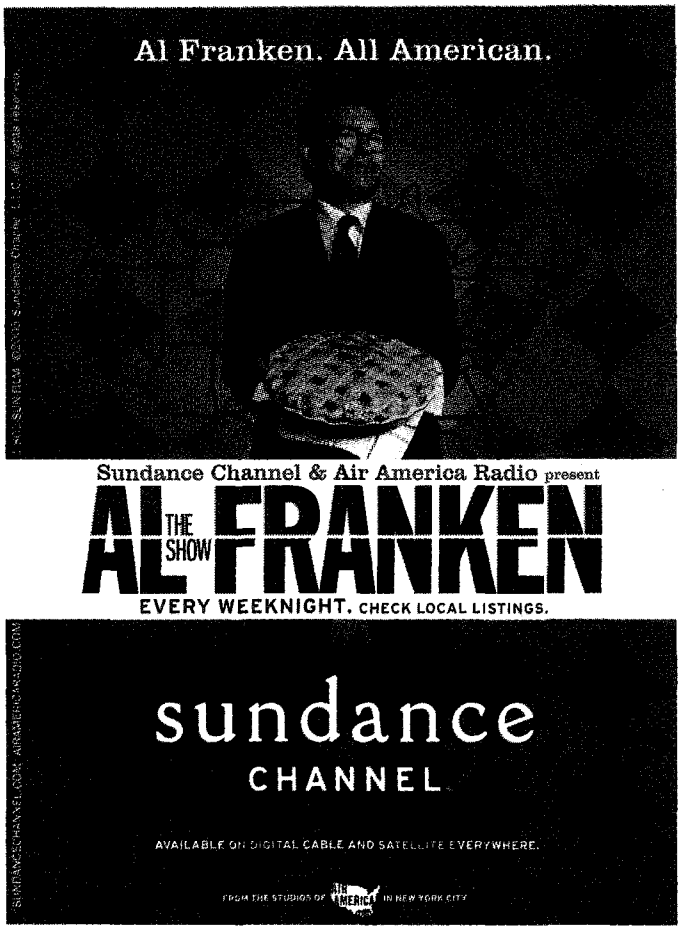
For the past few years many of us have been warning about the electronic voting machines, first publicized on the Internet by investigator Bev Harris, for which she was much reviled by the officers of such companies as Diebold, Sequoia, ES&S, Triad; this last voting computer company "has essentially admitted that it engaged in a course of behavior during the recount in numerous counties to provide 'cheat sheets' to those counting the ballots. The cheat sheets informed election officials how many votes they should find for each candidate, and how many over and under votes they should calculate to match the machine count. In that way, they could avoid doing a full county-wide hand recount mandated by state law."

Yet despite all this manpower and money power, exit polls showed that Kerry would win Ohio. So, what happened?

I have told more than enough of this mystery story so thoroughly investigated by Conyers and his Congressional colleagues and their staffers. Not only were the crimes against democracy investigated but the report on What Went Wrong in Ohio comes up with quite a number of ways to set things right.

Needless to say, this report was ignored when the Electoral College produced its unexamined tally of the votes state by state. Needless to say, no joint committee of the two houses of Congress was convened to consider the various crimes committed and to find ways and means to avoid their repetition in 2008, should we be allowed to hold an election once we have unilaterally, yet again, engaged in a war—this time with Iran. Anyway, thanks to Conyers, the writing is now high up there on the wall for us all to see clearly: "*Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin.*" Students of the Good Book will know what these words of God meant to Belshazzar and his cronies in old Babylon. GORE VIDAL

Gore Vidal's Imperial America *will be out in paperback this September.*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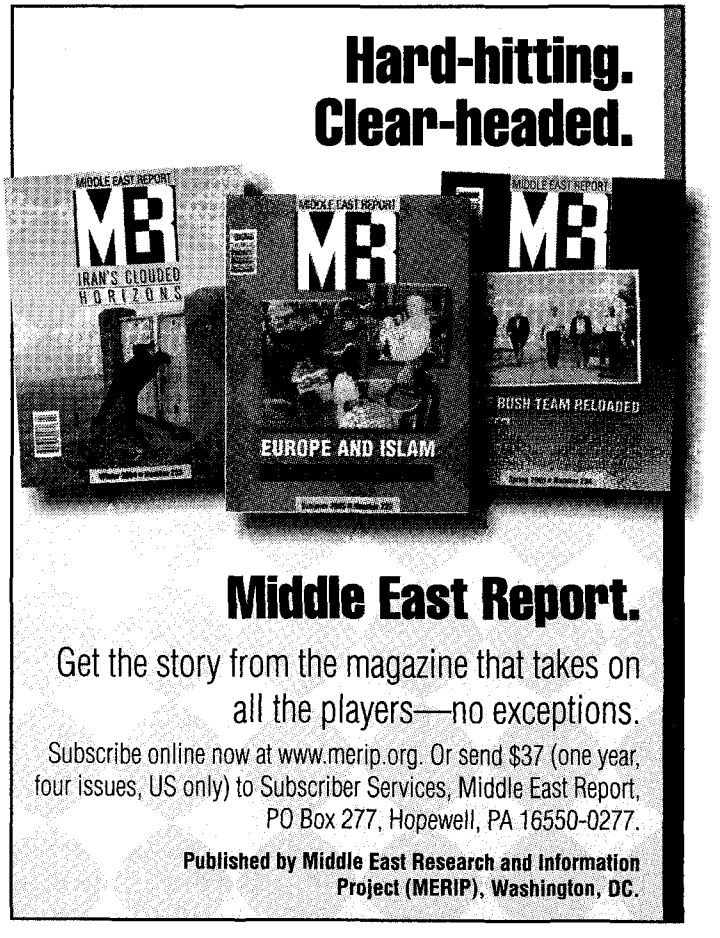
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ALEXANDER COCKBURN

Friedman's Imaginary India

Duck and cover, fellows, Thomas Friedman's back in India, and the mysterious subcontinent is exercising its usual sorcery on the wandering pundit, eliciting paragraphs of ecstatic drivel, as it has from so many *Times*-men.

My favorite remains a post-Christmas dispatch, published on December 27, 2002, by the *New York Times*'s resident correspondent in India at the time, Keith Bradsher. It was a devotional text about neoliberalism's apex poster boy at the time, N. Chandrababu Naidu, chief minister of the state of Andhra Pradesh, *Time*'s "South Asian of the Year."

After composing a worshipful résumé of Naidu's supposed achievements, Bradsher selected for particular mention a secret weapon that the canny reporter deemed vital to Naidu's political grip on Andhra Pradesh. "Naidu and his allies," Bradsher disclosed to *NYT* readers, "speak Telugu, a language spoken only in this state and by a few people in two adjacent states." What Bradsher was saying was that Naidu spoke the same language as the 75 million other inhabitants of Andhra Pradesh. It was as though someone ascribed Tony Blair's political successes in Britain to his command of English.

Apart from Naidu's wondrous fluency in his native tongue, Bradsher fixed upon other achievements likely to excite an American business readership: "Mr. Naidu," he confided, "has succeeded in raising electricity prices here by 70 percent" and "has enacted a law requiring union leaders to be workers from the factory or office they represent.... Andhra Pradesh has also relaxed some of the restrictions on laying off workers." In May 2004 the poster-boy pal of Bill Gates, Bill Clinton and the World Bank's then chief, James Wolfensohn, endured the verdict at the polling booth of his fellow Telugu speakers. The verdict was harsh. He and his coalition were ignominiously tossed from office.

I remembered Bradsher's excited commendation of Naidu's hikes in the price of electricity and his anti-union rampages when I read the reports filed by US correspondents and pundits from Paris after the French *Non!* in May to the EU's proposed Constitution. It was striking how many of them started lecturing the French in the tones of nineteenth-century Masters of Capital.

The *Non*, they howled, disclosed the cosseted and selfish laziness of French workers. This turned out to mean that French workers have laws protecting their pensions, health benefits, leisure time and kindred buttresses of a tolerable existence. No one was more outraged than Friedman, a man who, we can safely surmise, does have health benefits and enjoys confidence about his retirement along with a robust six-figure income.

From Bangalore on June 3 Friedman issued a furious rebuke. "French voters are trying to preserve a 35-hour work week in a world where Indian engineers are ready to work a 35-hour day.... Next to India, Western Europe looks like an assisted-living facility with Turkish nurses." I guess it does, though "engineers" is rather a dignified label to fix on the cyber-coolies—underpaid clerical workers—who toil night and day in Bangalore's call centers. But if you want a race to the bottom, of the sort Friedman calls for, you don't have to travel too far from Bangalore, maybe northeast—though any direction will do—into the former realm of poster boy Naidu, to find an Indian reality compared with which the so-called IT breakthroughs in India are like gnat bites on the hide of one of those buffaloes you see in photos in articles headlined "Timeless India Faces Change."

In Naidu's state at least 5,000 Indian farmers have committed suicide, and across India thousands more. Millions live millimeters from ruin and starvation. For hundreds of millions of poor Indians, Friedman's brave new world of the 1990s meant globalization of prices, Indianization of incomes. The state turned its back on the poor. Rural credit dried up. As employment crashed in the countryside to its lowest ever, distress migrations from the villages increased by tens of millions.

By 2002–03 foodgrain available per Indian was less than it had been at the time of the great Bengal famine of 1942–43. Kids get 600 calories a day where once they had 900. New user fees sent health costs soaring, and such costs have become a huge component of rural family debt. Newly commercialized education destroyed the hopes of hundreds of thousands of women, as families, given the narrowed options, favored sons over daughters. Farm kids simply dropped out. Even as Friedman hailed India's Tiger Economy, the country slipped to rank 127 in the UN's Human Development Index of 2003.

Remember, India has a billion people in it. Maybe 2 percent of them get to fly in a plane or go online. Around 10 percent are well-off, another 10 percent doing OK. By the most optimistic count we're left with more than half a billion of the poorest people on the planet. You could build call centers every mile from Mumbai to Bangalore, stuff teenagers with basic American slang in there working Friedman's stipulated thirty-five hours a day servicing American corporations, and you wouldn't make a dent in the problem, which is that you can't dump an agricultural economy, build a couple of Cyberabads and say with any claim to realism that a New and Better India has been born. New, yes. Better, no.

Most Western correspondents only travel to Kerala to deride as "hidebound" a state that elected a Communist government in 1957, distributed land to the poor, has decent health stats, near 100 percent literacy. In recent years the neoliberals have been running things there too, and in early June this year in a by-election, voters gave their opinion on such matters as recent efforts to privatize education. Normally elections in Kerala are razor-thin affairs. The by-election saw the ruling Congress party candidate shattered by one from the Communist Party (Maoist), who won with a margin of more than 40,000 votes, a Kerala record.

Take the Kerala result, throw in the shattering of Naidu and the BJP coalition last year, and you get a pretty good idea of what Indians don't like, namely Friedmanism in any shape or form, whether they read his columns in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam or even his crude versions of English. ■

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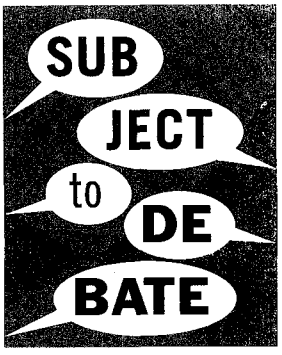
KATHA POLLITT

Brooklyn Prof in Godless Shocker



So it's 2005 and this is the academic question that has driven the *Daily News* and the right-wing *New York Sun* into apoplectic fits, and caused heartburn all over CUNY: Should Tim Shortell, an atheist, be allowed to assume the chair of the sociology department of Brooklyn College? You know, an atheist—someone who doesn't believe in God. An anticleric. A disrespecter of religion. A mocker of Christianity. Someone like, oh, Diderot ("Man will never be free until the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest"). Or Voltaire ("The truths of religion are never so well understood as by those who have lost the power of reasoning"). Or Bertrand Russell ("The Christian religion, as organized in its churches, has been and still is the principal enemy of moral progress in the world"). Actually, Russell is a particularly relevant example here. The appointment of one of the twentieth century's greatest logicians to a professorship at City College in 1940 set off a hysterical campaign against the "Godless advocate of free love" on the part of the Episcopal and Catholic churches, the Hearst papers and Tammany Hall. A flagrantly trumped-up lawsuit was fast-tracked through the system, Russell was denounced in the state legislature and the job offer was withdrawn.

Unfortunately, Shortell is no Bertrand Russell, whose *Why I Am Not a Christian* did so much to enliven my teenage years. For one thing, Russell was an energetic antireligious propagandist, while Shortell's low opinion of God and his fans is confined to a brief essay, "Religion and Morality: A Contradiction Explained," posted at www.anti-naturals.org, an obscure website with a vaguely Situationist flavor. For another, Russell was a terrific writer, while Shortell's essay is self-satisfied adolescent twaddle. Believers are "moral retards," "an ugly, violent lot": "In the heart of every Christian is a tiny voice preaching self-righteousness, paranoia and hatred. Christians claim that theirs is a faith based on love, but they'll just as soon kill you." Moral *retards*? Well, at least he can't be accused of linguistic PC.

Shortell's fighting words may have been intended, as he told me, as a "manifesto" aimed at a few avant-garde artists, but they gave the right plenty to work with in attacking his election to the chair. After reports of his election appeared in the *Sun* and *Daily News*, Brooklyn College president Christoph Kimmich wrote a letter to the *News* saying he found the essay "offensive" and had "convened a committee of three high-ranking Brooklyn College officials and asked them to investigate the situation." The handwriting must have been on the wall, because even as I was writing this column, Shortell withdrew his name from consideration. Whatever one thinks of the sentiments or the prose style of his essay, this is not a happy turn of events. A college president should champion academic freedom and professional standards, not side with those who assault them on the basis of someone's nonprofessional writing. Academic procedures exist for a reason. Do we really want the tabs micromanaging departmental decisions?

Besides, so what if Shortell's essay is offensive? Brooklyn College is a public, secular institution, not a Bible college. The *Sun* claimed Shortell's disdain for religion would cloud his judgment of job candidates, but there was never any evidence that this would be the case. No student ever complained about his teaching; his colleagues trusted him enough to elect him to the post; the student work posted on his website is apolitical and bland. Predictions of bias, absent any evidence, are just a backhanded way of attacking his beliefs. You might as well say no Southern Baptist should be chair, since someone who believes that women should be subject to their husbands, homosexuality is evil and Jews are doomed to hell won't be fair to female, gay or Jewish job candidates. Or no Orthodox Jew or Muslim should be chair because religious restrictions on contact with the opposite sex would privilege some job candidates over others.

But nobody ever does say that. As long as a believer ascribes his views to his faith, he can say anything he wants and if you don't like it, you're the bigot. Simplistic as Shortell's essay is, it does raise a useful point: Faith and morality are not only not the same, as Americans like to think, they express contradictory impulses. I believe Kierkegaard said something along these lines in *Fear and Trembling* in his discussion of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. Or as the physicist Steven Weinberg put it more recently: "With or without religion, you would have good people doing good things, and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, that takes religion." Would Weinberg be too "offensive" for CUNY?

The Tim Shortell case is not a blip, even at CUNY. Around the same time it went after Shortell, the *Sun* ran a front-page story accusing Priya Parmar, a young untenured professor in Brooklyn College's School of Education, of attacking standard English as "the language of oppressors," based on a reading assignment and complaints from two students accused of plagiarism. Under the guise of depoliticizing academia, David Horowitz is pushing the "Academic Bill of Rights," which would empower state legislatures to mandate "balance" in the classroom. His website invites students to report their teachers for such sins as "introduced controversial material," "mocked political/religious figures" and the ever-popular "biased grading." (What was the point of complaining, one student wrote sadly: "He has ten-year.")

People who believe in academic freedom have got to take these incidents seriously and get active before it's too late. "The perfect case is never going to come along," my old friend the historian Joshua Freeman told me. "Nobody is going to fire their Nobel laureate." Actually, City College almost did that: Ten years after losing his CCNY post, Bertrand Russell won the Nobel Prize for Literature. He certainly had the last laugh, but others weren't so lucky. The campaign against Russell blossomed into the Rapp-Coudert hearings, a general witch hunt for leftists in New York City's public schools and colleges. Some 800 educators were denounced; more than fifty lost their jobs, and a climate of fear was created that lasted for a long, long time. ■

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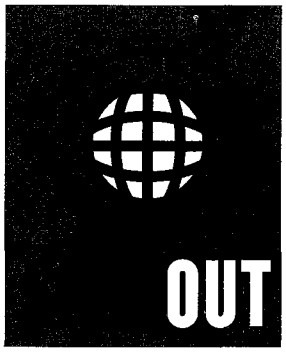
NAOMI KLEIN

A Noose, Not a Bracelet



Gordon Brown has a new idea about how to "make poverty history" in time for the G-8 summit in Scotland. With Washington so far refusing to double its aid to Africa by 2015, the British Chancellor is appealing to the "richer oil-producing states" of the Middle East to fill the funding gap. "Oil wealth urged to save Africa," reads the headline in London's *Observer*.

Here is a better idea: Instead of Saudi Arabia's oil wealth being used to "save Africa," how about if Africa's oil wealth was used to save Africa—along with its gas, diamond, gold, platinum, chromium, ferroalloy and coal wealth?

With all this noblesse oblige focused on saving Africa from its misery, it seems like a good time to remember someone else who tried to make poverty history: Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was killed ten years ago this November by the Nigerian government, along with eight other Ogoni activists, sentenced to death by hanging. Their crime was daring to insist that Nigeria was not poor at all but rich, and that it was political decisions made in the interests of Western multinational corporations that kept its people in desperate poverty. Saro-Wiwa gave his life to the idea that the vast oil wealth of the Niger Delta must leave behind more than polluted rivers, charred farmland, rancid air and crumbling schools. He asked not for charity, pity or "relief" but for justice.

The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People demanded that Shell compensate the people from whose land it had pumped roughly $30 billion worth of oil since the 1950s. The company turned to the government for help, and the Nigerian military turned its guns on demonstrators. Before his state-ordered hanging, Saro-Wiwa told the tribunal, "I and my colleagues are not the only ones on trial. Shell is here on trial.... The company has, indeed, ducked this particular trial, but its day will surely come."

Ten years later, 70 percent of Nigerians still live on less than $1 a day and Shell is still making superprofits. Equatorial Guinea, which has a major oil deal with ExxonMobil, "got to keep a mere 12 percent of the oil revenues in the first year of its contract," according to a *60 Minutes* report—a share so low it would have been scandalous even at the height of colonial oil pillage.

This is what keeps Africa poor: not a lack of political will but the tremendous profitability of the current arrangement. Sub-Saharan Africa, the poorest place on earth, is also its most profitable investment destination: It offers, according to the World Bank's 2003 Global Development Finance report, "the highest returns on foreign direct investment of any region in the world." Africa is poor because its investors and its creditors are so unspeakably rich.

The idea for which Saro-Wiwa died fighting—that the resources of the land should be used to benefit the people of that land—lies at the heart of every anticolonial struggle in history, from the Boston Tea Party to Iran's turfing of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in Abadan. This idea has been declared dead by the European Union's Constitution, by the National Security Strategy of the United States of America (which describes "free trade" not only as an economic policy but a "moral principle") and by countless trade agreements. And yet it simply refuses to die.

You can see it most clearly in the relentless protests that drove Bolivia's president, Carlos Mesa, to offer his resignation. A decade ago Bolivia was forced by the IMF to privatize its oil and gas industries on the promise that it would increase growth and spread prosperity. When that didn't work, the lenders demanded that Bolivia make up its budget shortfall by increasing taxes on the working poor. Bolivians had a better idea—take back the gas and use it for the benefit of the country. The debate now is over how much to take back. Evo Morales's Movement Toward Socialism favors taxing foreign profits by 50 percent. More radical indigenous groups, which have already seen their land stripped of its mineral wealth, want full nationalization and far more participation, what they call "nationalizing the government."

You can see it too in Iraq. On June 2 Laith Kubba, spokesman for the Iraqi prime minister, told journalists that the IMF had forced Iraq to increase the price of electricity and fuel in exchange for writing off past debts: "Iraq has $10 billions of debts, and I think we cannot avoid this." But days before, in Basra, a historic gathering of independent trade unionists, most of them with the General Union of Oil Employees, insisted that the government could avoid it. At Iraq's first antiprivatization conference, the delegates demanded that the government simply refuse to pay Saddam's "odious" debts and opposed any attempts to privatize state assets, including oil.

Neoliberalism, an ideology so powerful it tries to pass itself off as "modernity" while its maniacal true believers masquerade as disinterested technocrats, can no longer claim to be a consensus. It was decisively rejected by French voters when they said No to the EU Constitution, and you can see how hated it has become in Russia, where large majorities despise the profiteers of the disastrous 1990s privatizations and few mourned the recent sentencing of oil oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

All of this makes for interesting timing for the G-8 summit. Bob Geldof and the Make Poverty History crew have called for tens of thousands of people to go to Edinburgh and form a giant white band around the city center on July 2—a reference to the ubiquitous Make Poverty History bracelets.

But it seems a shame for a million people to travel all that way to be a giant bauble, a collective accessory to power. How about if, when all those people join hands, they declare themselves not a bracelet but a noose—a noose around the lethal economic policies that have already taken so many lives, for lack of medicine and clean water, for lack of justice.

A noose like the one that killed Ken. ■

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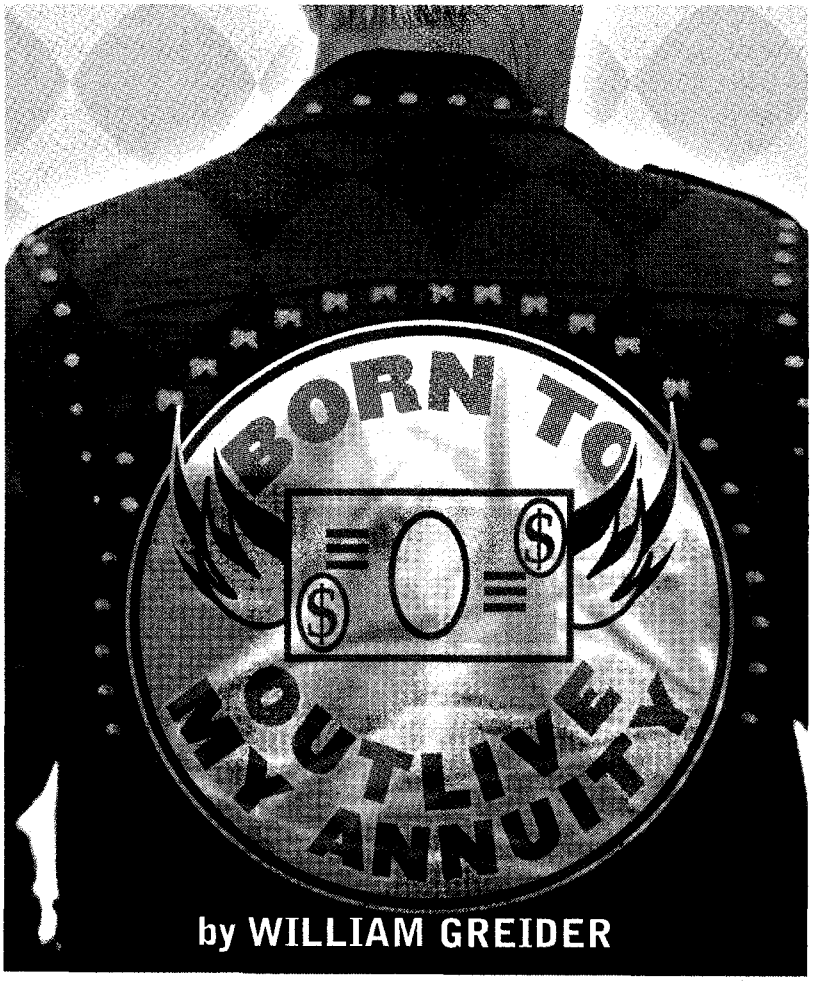
ARTICLES

The Geezer Threat

RIDING INTO THE SUNSET



by WILLIAM GREIDER

In 1900 Americans on average lived for only 49 years and most working people died still on the job. For those who lived long enough, the average "retirement" age was 85. By 1935, when Social Security was enacted, life expectancy had risen to 61 years. Now it is 77 years—nearly a generation more—and still rising. Children born today have a fifty-fifty chance of living to 100. This inheritance from the last century—the great gift of longer life—surely represents one of the country's most meaningful accomplishments.

Yet the achievement has been transformed into a monumental problem by contemporary politics and narrow-minded accounting. "The nation faces a severe economic threat from the aging of its population combined with escalating health costs," a *Washington Post* editorial warned. Others put it more harshly. "Greedy geezers" are robbing from the young, bankrupting the government. Painful solutions must be taken to avoid financial ruin. Or so we are told.

A much happier conviction is expressed by Robert Fogel, a Nobel Prize–winning economist at the University of Chicago and a septuagenarian himself. America, he reminds us, is a very wealthy nation. The expanding longevity is not a financial burden but an enormous and underdeveloped asset. If US per capita income continues to grow at a rate of 1.5 percent a year, the country will have plenty of money to finance comfortable retirements and high-quality healthcare for all citizens, including those at the bottom of the wage ladder. When politicians talk about raising the Social Security retirement age to 70 in order to "save" the system, they are headed backward and against the tide of human aspirations. The average retirement age, Fogel observes, has been falling in recent decades by personal choice and is now around 63. Given proper financing arrangements, he expects the retirement age will eventually fall to as low as 55—allowing everyone to enjoy more leisure years and to explore the many dimensions of "spiritual development" or "self-realization," as John Dewey called it.

"What then is the virtue of increasing spending on retirement and health rather than goods?" Fogel asked in his latest book, *The Fourth Great Awakening and the Future of Egalitarianism* (2000). "It is the virtue of providing consumers in rich countries with what they want most." What people want is time—more time to enjoy life and learning, to focus on the virtuous aspects of one's nature, to pursue social projects free of economic necessity, to engage their curiosity and self-knowledge or their political values. The great inequity in modern life, as Fogel provocatively puts it, is the "maldistribution of spiritual resources," that is, the economic insecurity that prevents people from exploring life's larger questions. Everyone could attain a fair share of liberating security, he asserts, if government undertook strategic interventions in their behalf.

Fogel's perspective is generally ignored by other economists, but sociologists and psychologists recognize his point in the changing behavior of retirees. The elderly are redefining leisure, finding "fun" in myriad activities that lend deeper meaning to their lives. An informal shadow university has grown up around the nation in which older people are both the students and the teachers. They do "volunteer vacationing" and "foster grandparenting." They rehab old houses for the needy, serve as self-appointed environmental watchdogs or act as ombudsmen for neglected groups like indigent children or nursing-home patients. They dig into political issues with an informed tenacity that often withers politicians. In civic engagement, they are becoming counselors, critics, caregivers and mentors equipped with special advantages—the time and freedom to act, the knowledge and understanding gained only from the experience of living.

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When the "largest generation" reaches retirement a few years from now, the baby boomers will doubtless alter the contours of society again, perhaps more profoundly than in their youth. Theodore Roszak, the historian who chronicled *The Making of a Counter Culture* thirty-six years ago, thinks boomers taking up caregiving and mentoring roles will inspire another wave of humanistic social values (perhaps expressed more maturely this time around). "More than merely surviving we will find ourselves gifted with the wits, the political savvy and the sheer weight of numbers to become a major force for change," Roszak wrote in *America the Wise* (1998). "With us, history shifts its rhythm. It draws back from the frenzied pursuit of marketing novelties and technological turnover and assumes the measured pace of humane and sustainable values. We may live to see wisdom become a distinct possibility and compassion the reigning social ethic." The "retired," he predicts, will seek to become reintegrated with the working society and claim a larger role in its affairs. Some elderly may reclaim the ancient role of respected "elders" who keep alive society's deeper truths and remind succeeding generations of their obligations to the nation's longer term. None of these possibilities are likely to unfold, however, if the promise of economic security for retirement is eviscerated in the meantime.

Fogel's vision of expanding leisure and greater human fulfillment is actually receding at the moment. The time for big ideas is now.

Fogel's optimism sounds eccentric amid the gloom and doom of the Social Security debate and the more threatening deterioration under way in private pensions and personal savings. Fogel skips over the snarled facts of current politics. He thinks big-picture and long-term. He won the Nobel Prize by producing unorthodox economic history that traced the deeper shifts in demographics and living conditions across generations, even centuries. His thinking is especially provocative because the conclusions collide with both left and right assumptions. Fogel is a secular Democrat, yet he extols the conservative evangelical awakening as a valuable social force. He sounds alternately conservative and liberal on economic issues, yet he thinks government should engineer a vast redistribution of financial wealth, from top to bottom, to insure equitable pensions for all.

Fogel's solution is a new national pension system alongside Social Security—a universal "provident fund" that requires all workers to save a significant portion of their wage incomes every year to provide for their future. He proposes a savings rate of 14.7 percent (though taking Social Security benefits and taxes into account, a lower rate would suffice for a start). The contributions would be mandatory but set aside as true personal savings, not as a government tax. The accumulating nest eggs would belong to the individual workers and become a portable pension that goes with them if they change jobs, but the wealth would be invested for them through a broadly diversified pension fund. Employers would no longer be in charge (though they could still contribute to worker savings to attract employees). The government or independent private institutions would manage the money, investing conservatively in stocks, bonds and other income-generating assets while allowing workers only limited, generalized choices on their investment preferences.

The concept resembles the forced savings plans adopted in some Asian and Latin American countries, but Fogel's favorite prototype is American: TIAA-CREF, the pension system that exists for nearly all college professors (a nonprofit institution founded in 1917 by Andrew Carnegie). Another model could be the government's own Thrift Savings Plan, which manages savings wealth for federal employees. Lifelong healthcare, Fogel adds, could be guaranteed for all by setting aside another 9.8 percent from current incomes. "If you take the typical academic, we all have TIAA-CREF," he explains. "The universities require of us that we invest anywhere from 12.5 to 17.5 percent of our salaries in a pension fund—mandatory—but it's all in my name. I can leave it to whomever I want. It has entered my sense of well-being for many years. The fund has earned about 10 percent a year since the 1960s, so retirement is not a burden to the university."

Obviously, people with low or even moderate incomes could not afford such savings rates, and even diligent savings from their low wages would not be enough to pay for either retirement or healthcare. Fogel has a straightforward solution: Tax the affluent to pay for the needy. A tax rate of 2 or 3 percent, applied progressively to families in the top half of income distribution, could finance the "provident fund" for those who can't pay for themselves. "This is a problem, not of inadequate national resources, but of inequity," he observes.

Fogel's big thinking—a system of compulsory savings, with the federal government taking charge—sounds way too radical for this right-wing era, and probably even most Democrats would shy away from the concept. But keep Fogel's solution in mind as we examine the sorry condition of retirement security. The current political debate is not even focused on the right "crisis," much less on genuine solutions. It is not Social Security that's financially threatened but healthcare and the other two pillars of retirement security—employer-run pension plans and the private savings of families. Many millions of baby boomers realize as they approach the "golden years" that they can't afford to retire at all, much less retire early. They will keep working because they lack the wherewithal to stop. Retiring for them would mean a drastic fall in their standard of living. Fogel's vision of expanding leisure and greater human fulfillment is actually receding at the moment. The time for big ideas is now.

Grasshoppers and Ants

When George W. Bush launched Social Security reform with his promise of new personalized savings accounts for everyone, he did not seem to grasp that most Americans already have such accounts. During the past generation tax-exempt 401(k) and IRA accounts—the individualized "defined contribution" approach—became the principal pension plan for working people, displacing the traditional company pension provided by employers who assume the risks and promise a "defined benefit" to workers at retirement. The do-it-yourself version of pensions is a flop, as many Americans have painfully learned. When older employees look at their monthly balance statements,

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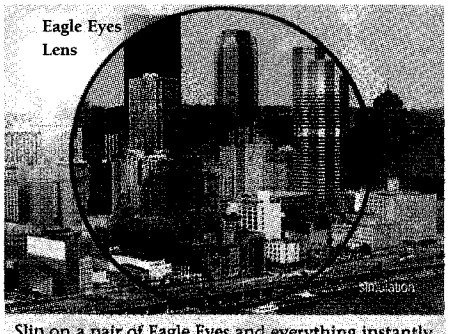

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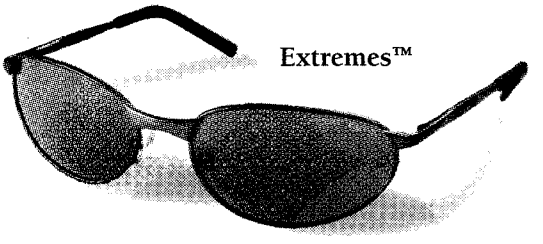

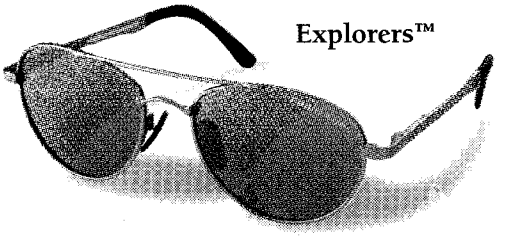

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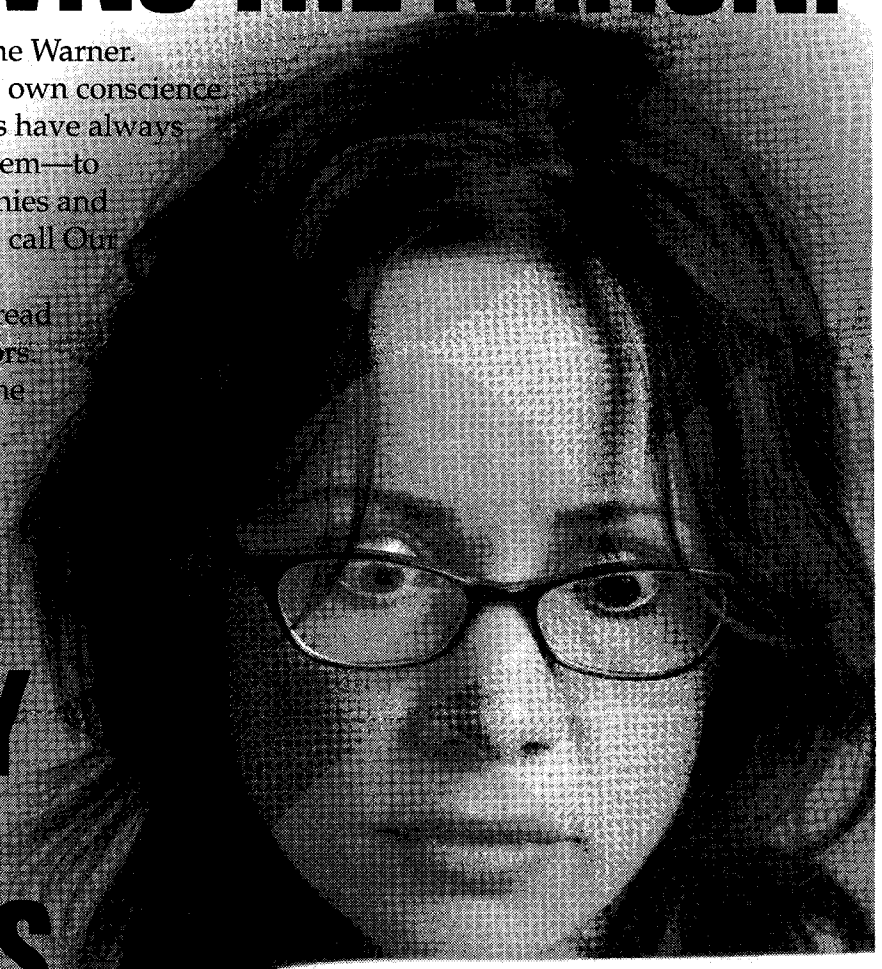

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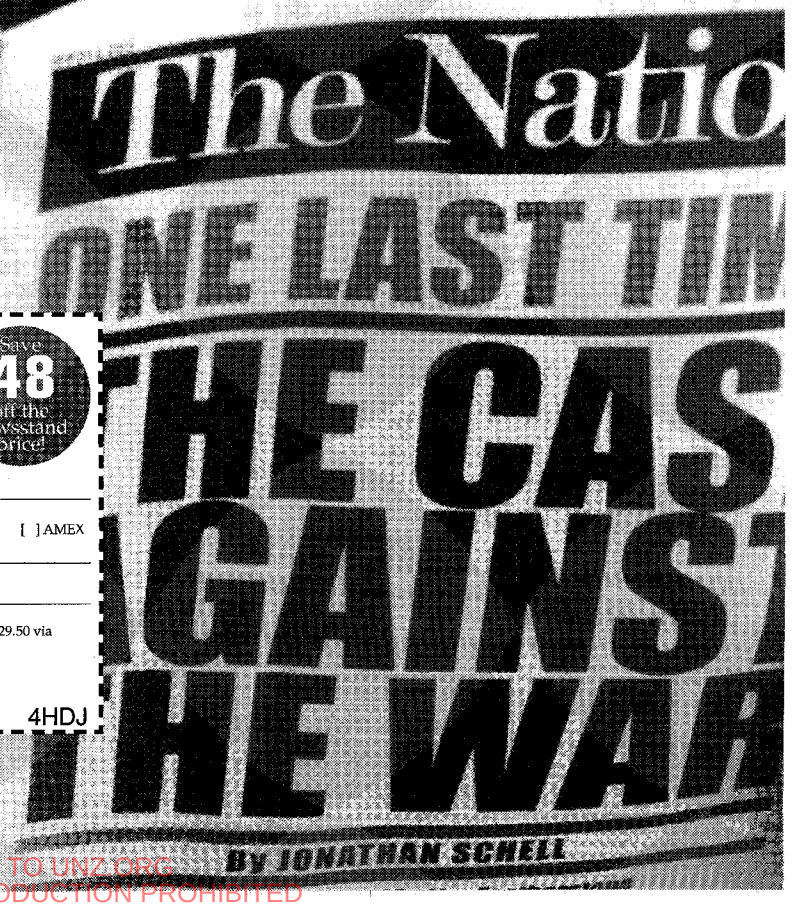

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they are more likely to experience fear than Bush's romanticized thrill of individual risk-taking.

Picking stocks for themselves has left many employees, perhaps as many as 40–45 percent, without an adequate nest egg for retirement. When Bush explains further that he intends to divert trillions from Social Security to finance his "ownership society," it makes people even more nervous. Social Security pays very modest average benefits—roughly equivalent to the federal minimum wage—but it is the last safety net. For nearly half of the private-sector workforce, it is the only safety net. The far more threatening problem is elsewhere—shrinking pensions, collapsed personal savings and soaring costs for health insurance.

The bleak reality is reflected in those 401(k) account balances. Of the 48 million families who hold one or more of the accounts, the median value of their savings is $27,000 (which means half of all families have less than $27,000). Among older workers on the brink of retiring (55 to 64 years old) who have personal accounts, the median value is $55,000. That's only enough to buy an annuity that would pay $398 a month, far short of middle-class living standards. What's strange and disturbing about their low accumulations is that these older workers have been investing during the best of times—the "super bull market" of soaring stock prices that lasted nearly twenty years. The Congressional Research Service summarized the sobering results: Median pension savings "would not by themselves provide an income in retirement that most people in the United States would find to be adequate."

The most threatening problem is not Social Security; it is shrinking pensions, collapsed personal savings and soaring health costs.

This grand experiment was launched nearly twenty-five years ago by Ronald Reagan, but with very little public debate because the pension changes were obscured by more immediate controversies—Reagan's regressive tax cuts and massive budget deficits. His Treasury under secretary explained the reasoning: "The evidence of the past suggests that people do not behave like grasshoppers. They are much more like ants." For lots of reasons, most Americans turned out not to be like the proverbial ants, storing food for winter. People either misjudged their future need for savings or couldn't afford to put much aside or bet wrong in the stock market and got wiped out. But corporate managements turned out to be the true grasshoppers, living for the moment and ignoring the future. Companies took advantage of the 401(k) innovation to escape their traditional responsibility to employees. They dumped old defined-benefit pension plans and adopted the new version, which requires much smaller employer contributions and thereby reduces labor costs dramatically. Good for the bottom line, bad for the country's future.

"The whole thinking was: Let's relieve the employers of this burden and empower individuals," explains Karen Ferguson, longtime director of the Pension Rights Center in Washington. "The problem is, it has failed—and failed miserably—and no one wants to say that."

Pension protection is actually shrinking, despite the proliferation of 401(k) accounts and the alleged prosperity of the 1980s and '90s. In the private sector, fewer employees participate in pension plans of any kind now than twenty years ago, down from 51 percent to 46 percent (the defined-benefit company pensions that once covered 53 percent now protect only 34 percent). The value of pension wealth, meanwhile, fell by 17 percent for workers in the middle and below, mainly because their voluntary savings were weak or nonexistent, yet soared for those at the top—"an upsurge in pension wealth inequality," economist Edward Wolff of New York University observed.

In sum, pensions became less valuable. And fewer families have one. That helps explain why Bush's plan encountered popular resistance. In these circumstances, whacking Social Security benefits or raising the retirement age does not sound like "reform." But neither political party has yet summoned the nerve to acknowledge the implications of the failed experiment or to propose serious solutions.

The circumstances look even more ominous—the very opposite of Professor Fogel's sunny vision—because personal savings also collapsed during the long, slow-motion weakening of pensions. Given the stagnating wages for hourly workers and easier access to credit, families typically managed to stay afloat by working more jobs and by borrowing more. Saving for the future was not an available option for many. In 1982 personal savings peaked at $480 billion, then began an epic decline. Last year the national total in personal savings was only $103 billion—down nearly 80 percent from twenty-five years ago. As Eugene Steuerle of the Urban Institute points out, the federal government now spends more money on tax subsidies to encourage the individual forms of pension savings—$115 billion last year—than Americans actually save.

The one potential bright spot in this story might be real estate—the family wealth that accumulates gradually through home ownership and the rising market value of houses. Given the current housing boom and runaway prices in the hotter urban markets, many families might salvage retirement plans by selling their homes and moving to less expensive dwellings. The trouble is, families have been living off that wealth—borrowing, almost dollar for dollar, against the rising price of their homes through equity-credit lines or refinanced mortgages. From 1999 through 2003, the value of family homes rose by a spectacular $3.3 trillion, but families' actual equity in those properties changed little because mortgage borrowing rose nearly as fast.

Thus, people financed routine consumption by borrowing against their long-term assets—that's real grasshopper behavior. And the situation could turn very ugly if the housing bubble pops and home prices fall. People will find themselves stuck paying off a mountain of debt on homes that are suddenly worth less than the mortgages. They will not only need to keep working; they might also be filing for bankruptcy.

How could this have happened in such a wealthy nation—especially during an era when stock prices were rising explosively? The basic explanations are familiar: rising inequality and reactionary economic policies, launched first by Reagan, then elaborated by Bush II and resisted only faintheartedly by Democrats. The corporate "social contract" was discarded; regressive tax-cutting rewarded capital and the well-to-do; numerous other measures

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fractured the broad middle class. The wages of hourly workers—80 percent of the private-sector workforce—have been essentially unchanged in terms of real purchasing power for three decades (no one in politics wants to talk about that, either). The political system continues to defer to the needs of corporations despite the torrent of financial scandals and extreme greed displayed by egomaniacal CEOs. All these factors contributed to the erosion of retirement security. Economist Teresa Ghilarducci, a pension authority at Notre Dame, remarks, "Just as wealth and income are being redistributed to the wealthy, so is leisure."

In fact, Ghilarducci argues, allowing the pension system to deteriorate serves a long-term interest of business: avoiding future labor shortages when the baby-boom generation moves into retirement. "All this retirement policy is really a labor policy," she asserts. "It's motivated by these experts who say, Hey, wait, we're going to need to do what we can to encourage people to work longer. A whole range of economists and elite opinion makers is talking about a labor shortage where, God forbid, wages would increase. That's what they're worried about—making sure there isn't a corporate profit squeeze, that skill shortages and upward wage pressures are checked."

'Just as wealth and income are being redistributed to the wealthy, so is leisure.' —economist Teresa Ghilarducci

This development is already lengthening working lives, she finds. The average retirement age, rather than gradually declining toward 55, as Fogel foresees, has turned around in the past few years and is slowly increasing. "I'm not against older people working if they want to," Ghilarducci says. "I'm against policies that force them back into the workforce because they've lost their pensions or their healthcare costs have gone up."

One need not question the sincerity of the right's ideological convictions to see that their policy initiatives are also designed to benefit important political patrons. With the transition to 401(k) accounts, corporate employers were major winners. Ghilarducci's examination of 700 companies over nearly two decades found that their annual pension contributions dropped by one third—from $2,140 to $1,404 per employee—as they shifted from defined-benefit pensions to the less expensive defined-contribution model. Not surprisingly, the traditional company pension began to disappear or shrink as large industrial companies hacked away at the uncompetitive costs. The number of younger workers with the traditional form of pension is much smaller and falling fast.

Wall Street banks and brokerages were big winners too, since they began competing for the millions of new "investors" with their individual stock accounts. This enormous influx of customers helped fuel the long stock-market boom and encouraged the exaggerated promises made by both corporations and financial firms. The overall economy was probably damaged too, because mutual funds competed for customers by going after rapid, short-term gains rather than focusing on the long-term investments financed by patient capital. When the stock-market illusions burst in 2000, the meltdown evaporated lots of retirement accounts too, especially for those innocent risk-takers who had bet their savings on NASDAQ's high-flying tech stocks.

The most damning fact about the 401(k) experiment is that it has failed to fulfill the original purpose: boosting savings for ordinary Americans. Academic studies have confirmed that the personal accounts produced "very little net savings" or "statistically insignificant" gains. While every worker could participate in theory, the practical reality is that only the more affluent families could afford to take full advantage of the 401(k) tax break—sheltering their annual 401(k) contributions from income taxes. But typically they did so simply by moving money from other conventional savings accounts into the tax-exempt kind.

More affluent Americans thus reduced their income taxes, but their net savings did not actually increase. For two decades, the federal government has been heavily subsidizing "savings" by the people who needed no inducement because they were already saving. Think of it as welfare for the virtuously well-to-do. A rational government would phase out such a misconceived program. Bush is instead proposing to make the contradictions worse by adding still other tax-exempt savings vehicles designed to benefit the affluent.

The old system of defined-benefit pensions had many strengths by comparison, but it was never a solution to the national problem either. Even at their peak, the traditional corporate pensions left out half of the workforce. Larger companies, especially in unionized industrial sectors, provided strong benefits for their employees, responding to labor's bargaining demands and to attract well-qualified people. But the millions of very small firms, where more Americans work, almost never offered pensions. The burden either seemed too costly or too complicated to administer. Generally, their workers are the folks who depend solely on Social Security.

The corporate pensions are also not portable (a problem the individual accounts were supposed to solve). And pension law gives corporate managers ample latitude to game their pension funds to enhance the company's bottom line. Stories of elderly retirees stranded by their old employers are now commonplace: broken promises on healthcare and other benefits that go unpunished. Instead of accumulating larger surpluses during the good times, the corporations often did the opposite, leaving their pension funds severely underfunded for the bad times, when shortfalls couldn't be overcome. Employees have no representatives to speak for them in the decision-making. If a corporate pension fund goes belly up, its liabilities are dumped on the government's insurance agency, which is getting strapped itself.

A logical and achievable solution exists to correct this mess. Government should create a new hybrid pension that combines the best aspects of defined-benefit and defined-contribution versions—one that requires all workers to save for the future and no longer relies on the "good will" of employers. Given modern employment patterns, workers do need a portable pension that stays with them, job to job. But their voluntary savings are simply too small and erratic—too vulnerable to manipulation by financial brokers—to produce secure results in the stock-market casino. Either they get lured into wild gambles or they park their savings in mutual funds that gouge them with inflated fees and commissions while catering to the corporations that are the funds' largest customers (this conflict of interest between large

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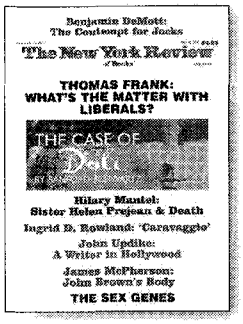

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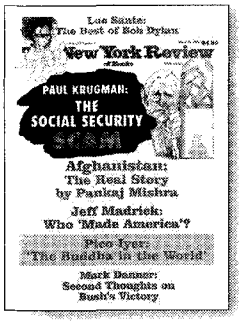

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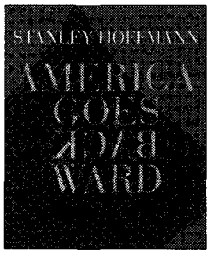

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and small customers is endemic to the US financial system; guess who loses). The employees' money will produce far more reliable accumulations if it is invested for them by professionals at a major independent pension fund that works only for them.

The fundamental truth (well understood among experts) is that individualized accounts can never match the investment returns of a large common fund, broadly diversified and soundly managed, because the pension fund is able to average its results over a very long time span, thirty years or more. A few wise guys might beat the casino odds, but the broad herd of small investors will always be captive to the random luck of bad timing and their own ignorance. The right wing's celebration of individual risk-taking in financial markets is like inviting sheep to the slaughter.

The super bull market is over. Its gorgeous returns will not return for many years, maybe many decades. But a very large, diversified pension fund—managed solely in the interests of its contributors—provides the vehicle for "shared luck." It can smooth out the ups and downs among all participants, young and old, lucky and unlucky. It can invest for long-term economic development rather than chase stock-market fads. Good returns for retirees, good results for the economy.

A universal savings system that covers everyone because it is mandatory could prove to be as durable (and popular) as Social Security.

These are the very qualities Professor Fogel envisions. They describe trustworthy pension systems, like TIAA-CREF, which reliably serves many thousands of individual employees (teachers and professors) who are scattered across many different employers (schools and universities). The present reform debate is not thinking this way. Collective action is out of fashion, especially if the government is involved. Significant reform would require institution-building. The transition would pose many technical difficulties. "There are obstacles, but I don't think that's the problem," Ghilarducci says. "The obstacle is imagination."

Pro-Life Pension Reform

The Pension Rights Center just conducted a year-long "conversation on coverage" that pulled together experts from business and labor, the insurance industry, Wall Street finance, academia, AARP and other interested sectors. The workshop sessions produced a long list of worthy ideas for patching up the broken system, but that was the problem: The proposals basically involved incremental tinkering with the status quo, not universal, mandatory solutions. To get all these diverse interests to join the conversation, Karen Ferguson confides, the center had to stipulate that "mandatory" would not be discussed.

"The bottom line is that the companies always have the upper hand, even though they've gotten huge subsidies and tax benefits," she explains. "The system is voluntary, so companies can always opt out." Indeed, the politics of pension reform is usually a discussion about what new favors and concessions should be granted to employers to get them to do the "right thing" for their employees. This political logic led to the current failure. "Voluntary" is a loser, as the past twenty years amply demonstrated, because it gives companies controlling leverage over what is possible. And even well-intentioned executives will always have to choose between the company's self-interest and its employees (guess who usually loses). Only the government has the reach and power to design and oversee a pension system that truly serves all. During the past generation, most corporations discarded their obligations under the old social contract. It seems only fair they should forfeit political control too.

Plausible plans in addition to Fogel's do exist that offer genuine solutions. A universal savings system that covers everyone because it is mandatory could prove to be as durable (and popular) as Social Security. It balances equity by subsidizing the savings of lower-income workers. It creates authentic individual ownership and incentives to save more for the future, consume less in the present. It operates free of Wall Street profiteers and under government supervision, adhering to well-established principles of sound investing. Employers could be discouraged from further abandoning their obligations by penalties in the tax code. Many other nations, large and small and far less wealthy, have created such systems. Americans would need to craft their own distinctive version.

One promising example, designed by economist Christian Weller for the Economic Policy Institute, proposes a modest savings rate of 3 percent of wages, but combined with the existing Social Security benefits, it would approach the level of retirement security envisioned by Fogel. The government would contribute substantial savings for low earners and also match additional contributions made by the workers or their employers. Weller estimates this would cost around $48 billion a year—less than half the federal tax subsidy now devoted to all pension plans. Weller's design is robustly equitable, scaled to help the bottom rungs most and top income earners least. Combined with Social Security, low earners (wages of $24,000 or less) would enjoy a pension that replaces 83 percent of their peak working wages. Average earners would get 60 percent replacement, high earners only 48 percent. This makes sense, because higher-income families have much greater opportunity to augment pensions with other sources of income and savings. The working poor do not.

Essentially, Weller has updated and expanded a mandatory savings plan that was proposed nearly twenty-five years ago—a last gasp from the Carter Administration. Reagan's election and laissez-faire politics snuffed the idea. While still modest in scale, Weller's design represents a meaningful start toward Fogel's larger vision of a 15 percent savings rate. Since the Social Security tax now collects 12.6 percent of wages jointly from workers and employers, it is not plausible at this point to add another 15 percent to labor costs for pension savings. However, as the new pension system matures and public confidence is established, a gradual transition can be pursued that adds little by little to the personal savings rate, offset by equivalent reductions in the payroll tax for Social Security—thus yielding greater savings and lower taxes. Both government systems would continue in place, one as the fundamental safety net of social insurance, the other as the universal, expanding pillar for comfortable retirement.

Ghilarducci thinks much of the accumulating wealth could be stored and invested by large private pension funds, organized by unions or other groups for workers at multiple employers (much like TIAA-CREF's role for universities). A successful

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existing model is the unified pension systems for the building and construction trades. Co-managed by unions and companies, they encourage industry and labor to collaborate on joint training and other productivity-enhancing endeavors that can raise the quality of work and wages.

While most politicians don't dare embrace a "mandatory" solution—not yet, anyway—it is not self-evident that ordinary Americans would reject one, if properly educated about the alternatives. Most people are conflicted. They know they need to save more—retirement is a very meaningful investment for them—but it's very hard to accomplish, given the competing pressures. They like the concept of personal accounts but are also aware of their vulnerability as amateur investors. In her conversations with union presidents, Ghilarducci finds they are more in favor of an "add on" national pension than raising the payroll tax for Social Security. "You can sell workers if their name is on it," she concludes. "If you had a system that says you must contribute 3 percent of wages to your mandatory savings account, you would actually have two-thirds of the workers grateful that they are being forced to save. You wouldn't get that if they were forced to pay another 3 percent in taxes into Social Security."

The retirement question—choices of mandatory or voluntary, universal or incremental—embodies a classic dilemma often facing liberal politics. Do reformers pursue the larger, more provocative approach that invites greater resistance but would fundamentally solve the problem? Or do they opt for smaller, safer measures that have a better chance of adoption and will demonstrate good intentions, if not a genuine remedy for society? For several decades, it seems obvious, most Democrats have chosen the side of caution: thinking small, offering symbolic gestures, avoiding fights over fundamental solutions. One can see where this strategy has gotten the party. The gestures are no longer taken seriously, since they don't lead anywhere. The public no longer associates Democrats with big ideas or principled commitments to authentic reform. We await incautious politicians with the courage to pursue their unfashionable convictions. ■

AYAAN HIRSI ALI HAS ENRAGED MUSLIMS WITH HER ATTACKS ON THEIR SEXUAL MORES.

The Dutch-Muslim Culture War

DEBORAH SCROGGINS

Ayaan Hirsi Ali is supposed to be on the run, but, as one last spring snowstorm turned Amsterdam's lacy bridges and gabled canal houses into a confectioner's delight, she seemed to be everywhere. On television the slim, pantsuit-clad, Somali-born legislator demanded that the Dutch intelligence service investigate the honor killings of Muslim girls. In the pages of newspapers she harangued the health authorities to examine schoolgirls for evidence of genital mutilation. At prize ceremonies she warned European governments that women in their Muslim communities remain under threat.

TIM ROBINSON

Seven months ago, Hirsi Ali's implacable campaign against what she views as Islam's oppression of women prompted a Muslim fanatic to ritually slaughter Theo van Gogh, her Dutch collaborator on the film *Submission*. The murderer used his knife to affix a five-page letter to the corpse promising the same treatment for Hirsi Ali and another Dutch politician who has criticized Islam. The murder sent Dutch society into paroxysms of rage and fear, sparking dozens of attacks on mosques and schools. But it didn't seem to faze Hirsi Ali. In a series of defiant interviews, the former refugee refused to be intimidated. When a group of Muslims tried to block her from making a sequel to *Submission*, she fought back in court and won. Like a dark avenging angel, she seemed to loom over Holland's wintry Dutch, her ubiquitous media presence a virtual guarantee of further conflict.

In the United States, where few people have had the chance to read or see her critiques of Islam, the 35-year-old Hirsi Ali has been almost exclusively portrayed as a champion of free speech and women's rights. In the Netherlands, however, she remains the subject of intense controversy. Well before van Gogh's murder, she had become a major hate figure among Dutch Muslims, who accuse her of stirring up Islamophobia on behalf of a cabal of right-wing politicians and columnists. Since the murder, a surprising number of native-born Dutch intellectuals have come around to the Muslim point of view.

In a series of "Letters to Hirsi Ali" published this spring in the newspaper *De Volkskrant*, several well-known, mostly male writers charged her with poisoning the political atmosphere with her strident attacks on Islam and the Prophet Mohammed. They argued that by pandering to Dutch prejudices and putting Muslims on the defensive, she contributes to the very Islamic radicalization she claims to want to stop. In a book rushed into print in February, the popular historian Geert Mak went so far as to compare *Submission* to Joseph Goebbels's infamous Nazi propaganda film *The Eternal Jew*. He warned that the Netherlands could be on the road to civil war. "When the time comes for us to tell our grandchildren, how will we tell the story of the last months of 2004?" Mak asked breathlessly. "The tone, the new tone that suddenly had taken hold? Where did it all begin?"

The backlash against Hirsi Ali has astonished and disap-

Deborah Scroggins is the author of Emma's War: An Aid Worker, a Warlord, Radical Islam and the Politics of Oil *(Vintage). Research support was provided by the Investigative Fund of the Nation Institute.*

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pointed many Dutch feminists, who continue to count themselves among her biggest fans. Margreet Fogteloo, editor of the weekly *De Groene Amsterdammer*, said flatly that Mak is crazy. "People like him feel guilty because they were closing their eyes for such a long time to what was going on," she said. In what appears to be a Europe-wide pattern, some feminists are aligning themselves with the anti-immigrant right against their former multiculturalist allies on the left. Joining them in this exodus to the right are gay activists, who blame Muslim immigrants for the rising number of attacks on gay couples.

The woman who has stirred so many emotions is slight and doe-eyed, with a soft voice and small hands. Her life is itself a testament to the fluidity of Muslim politics: Today's radical feminist was once a teenage Islamist. Born in 1969, she's the daughter of a Somali opposition politician who attended Columbia University in the 1960s, becoming a staunch anti-Communist. But exposure to the West failed to change his traditional attitudes about the proper place of women, and he justified those attitudes by invoking Islam. Back in Somalia, he eventually took four wives. As is customary in Somalia, Hirsi Ali's mother and grandmother forced her to undergo what she calls "the cruel ritual" of female genital mutilation at the age of 6. "I remember the lesson I learned more than the pain," Hirsi Ali told one interviewer. "That to be a Muslim woman is to be born for the pleasure of men." A year later, after the Somali dictator Mohammed Siad Barre imprisoned her father, the family was forced to flee the country. In Saudi Arabia she and her sister were veiled and kept indoors, forced to endure what she now calls "gender apartheid."

'I remember the lesson [of female genital mutilation]...to be born a Muslim woman is to be born for the pleasure of men.' —Hirsi Ali

Under the influence of an Iranian teacher, Hirsi Ali spent her high school years fully veiled. She has said that when the Ayatollah Khomeini issued his 1989 *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie, her first thought was, "Oh, he should be killed." Later Hirsi Ali began trying to find a way out of what she would eventually call "the virgin's cage," the obsession with sexual morality that she now argues has crippled the Muslim world. At the age of 22, she saw her chance. "As a Muslim girl, I was given in marriage to a nephew, after which I was expected to live out my days in isolation, as a housewife and mother," she has written. The nephew lived in Canada. In Germany on the way to join him, she fled from relatives, hopped a train to Amsterdam and asked the Netherlands for asylum. Perhaps because she had already placed herself outside the social pale of the local Muslim community, she took another unusual step. Rather than turning to other immigrants for help, as most newcomers do, she found herself a Dutch foster mother. Her foster mother helped her learn the language. She took jobs as a cleaner and at a factory. Eventually she managed to earn a degree in politics at Leiden University.

Hirsi Ali began translating for the Dutch social services in shelters and hospitals while she was still in the asylum center. Over the years, she met women who had been locked inside their homes for years; she interviewed others who had been raped and beaten. She heard about girls who had been killed for holding hands with non-Muslim boys. Armed with her new understanding of women's rights under Dutch law, she was outraged to learn that the authorities seldom interfered in such cases, writing them off as "family conflicts." She had read and strongly agreed with the late American feminist Susan Moller Okin's argument that multiculturalist policies aimed at protecting "culture" often end up contributing to the repression of women and children. She took particular exception to the Dutch policy of subsidizing more than 700 Islamic mosques, schools and clubs. She said conservative Muslim men use them to perpetuate their ideas about gender and sexuality and to prevent Dutch Muslim women from exercising their legal rights.

There was always a latent conflict in the idea of Europe's most sexually wide-open country funding institutions aimed at promoting traditional Muslim values. Pim Fortuyn, an openly gay sociology professor, seized on that conflict after a number of assaults on gay couples by Muslim youth. He ran for office in Rotterdam in 2001 and won handily on a platform calling for a halt to Muslim immigration. Labeling Islam a "backward" religion, he questioned whether Muslim attitudes toward women and homosexuality were compatible with Dutch ideas of individual rights. Fortuyn's anti-Muslim rants coincided with a series of attacks on mosques. Nevertheless, the popularity of his ideas soon had every Dutch party moving to the right on immigration.

In this climate of rising social tensions, Hirsi Ali landed a job at the Labor Party's think tank, the Wiardi Beckman Institute. Shortly after the 9/11 attacks she was invited to discuss Islam and gender on television. Asked to comment on Fortuyn's descriptions of Islam, she said, "By some criteria, Islam could be considered a backward religion." The reaction that followed shocked everyone, except possibly Hirsi Ali herself. There were written death threats, and when she walked in the street, groups of Muslim boys called her a whore and shouted that they wanted to kill her. She had to leave the country briefly. Pim Fortuyn's shocking assassination in May 2002, Holland's first political murder in 300 years, hardened Hirsi Ali's determination to press forward. That fall she wrote an article calling upon Muslim women to abandon the "outdated religious opinions" that prevented them from claiming their rights under Dutch law. A circle of older Dutch writers and politicians began to gather around her. Some, like the University of Utrecht philosopher Herman Phillipse, warned that Holland's Muslim community was rapidly becoming indigestible. Others, such as the writer Paul Scheffer, favored using the government to promote integration. The politician Geert Wilders was perhaps the most inflammatory. "Why are we afraid to tell Muslims to adapt to us, simply because our values and norms represent a higher level of civilization—better, more pleasant and more humane. No more integration, but assimilation!" Wilders wrote.

Meanwhile, Hirsi Ali focused her broadsides more and more plainly on Islam itself. She wrote that the Prophet Mohammed was a "despicable" individual who had married "the 9-year-old daughter of his best friend." "Mohammed is, by our Western standards, a perverse man," she wrote. "A tyrant. He is against free speech. If you do not do what he says, then you will have an

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unhappy ending. It makes me think of all those megalomaniac rulers in the Middle East: bin Laden, Khomeini, Saddam." By this point, Hirsi Ali had gravitated further to the right; she left the Labor Party for the center-right Liberal VVD Party and won a parliamentary seat in 2003.

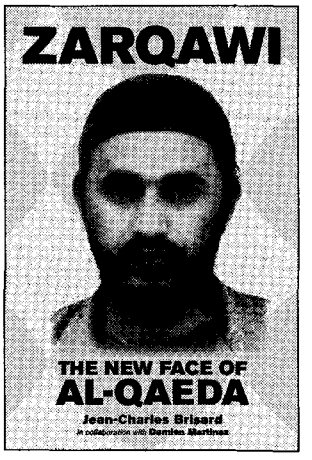
Hirsi Ali's many critics contend that far from being a revolutionary, she brings a message that the West is all too willing to hear. They say that in calling for European governments to protect Muslim women from Muslim men, she and her admirers recycle the same Orientalist tropes that the West has used since colonial times as an excuse to control and subjugate Muslims. "White men saving black women from black men—it's a very old fantasy that is always popular," Annelies Moors, a University of Amsterdam anthropologist who writes about Islamic gender relations, said dryly. "But I don't think male violence against women, a phenomenon known to every society in history, can be explained by a few Koranic verses."

Moors and others don't dispute the existence of the social problems Hirsi Ali identifies. Many Dutch Muslim women do live in segregated "parallel cities" where Islamic social codes are enforced. Muslims make up only 5.5 percent of the Dutch population, but they account for more than half the women in battered women's shelters and more than half of those seeking abortions. Muslim girls have far higher suicide rates than non-Muslim girls. Some Muslim girls, mostly African, are genitally mutilated. But in putting all the blame on Islam, they say, Hirsi Ali ignores the influence of patriarchal custom as well as the work of a generation of Muslim feminists. They point to thinkers like Fatima Mernissi and Amina Wadud, who have shown that Islam's sacred texts can be interpreted in a more female-friendly way. And they say Hirsi Ali avoids mention of the role the West has played and continues to play in assisting the rise of the Islamist movements. "The rightist forces and the radical Islamists feed on each other, and she contributes to that," Moors said.

Karima Belhaj is the director of the largest women's shelter in Amsterdam. She's also one of the organizers of the "Stop the Witchhunt!" campaign against what she sees as anti-Muslim hysteria. On the day we talked, she was despondent. Arsonists had set fire for the second time to an Islamic school in the town of Uden. A few days later a regional police unit warned that the rise of right-wing Dutch youth gangs potentially presents a more dangerous threat to the country than Islamist terrorism. "The rise of Islamism is not the problem," Belhaj said. "The problem is that hatred against Arabs and Muslims is shown in this country without any shame." With her message that Muslim women must give up their faith and their families if they want to be liberated, Hirsi Ali is actually driving women into the arms of the fundamentalists, said Belhaj: "She attacks their values, so they are wearing more and more veils. It frightens me. I'm losing my country. I'm losing my people."

If Belhaj was sad, another "Stop the Witchhunt!" organizer was angry. Like Belhaj, Miriyam Aouragh is a second-generation immigrant of Moroccan background. A self-described peace and women's activist, Aouragh was the first in her family to attend university. She's now studying for a PhD in anthropology. She scoffs at the idea that Hirsi Ali is a champion of oppressed Muslim women. "She's nothing but an Uncle Tom," Aouragh said.

ZARQAWI
THE NEW FACE OF AL-QAEDA
By Jean-Charles Brisard
with Damien Martinez



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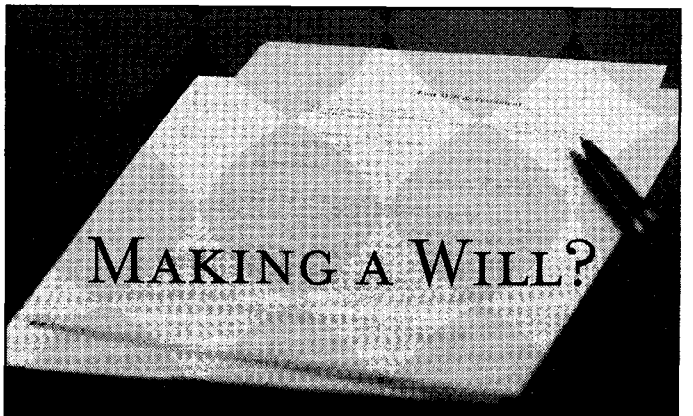

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"She has never fought for the oppressed. In fact, she's done the opposite. She uses these problems as a cover to attack Islam. She insults me and she makes my life as a feminist ten times harder because she forces me to be associated with anti-Muslim attacks."

Aouragh accuses Hirsi Ali and her political allies of deliberately fostering the hostility that has led to the attacks on Islamic institutions and to police brutality against young Muslim men. "I'm surprised the Arab-Muslim community isn't *more* angry with her," Aouragh said. "When she talks about Muslims as violent people, and Muslim men as rapists, this is very insulting. She calls the Prophet a pedophile. Theo van Gogh called the Prophet a pimp, a goat-fucker. Well, no, we don't accept that."

Although the press has focused on the threats against critics of Islam like Hirsi Ali and Geert Wilders, Aouragh says that there have been many more attacks on Dutch Muslims than on non-Muslims. She suspects that what the Dutch really fear is not Islamic fundamentalism but the prospect of having to deal with a new generation of highly educated young Muslims who demand a fair hearing for their values. "We are telling them, 'We have rights, too. You have to change your idea about freedom or face the consequences.'"

Hirsi Ali is 'nothing but an Uncle Tom. She has never fought for the oppressed. In fact, she's done the opposite,' says activist Miriyam Aouragh.

Whatever happens to Hirsi Ali, the debate she helped polarize over women and Islam is sure to spread and intensify all over Europe in the next few years. As Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris have argued in their book *Rising Tide*, the true clash of opinions between Islam and the West is not about democracy but sex. Successive World Values Surveys, in which social scientists polled public opinion in more than eighty countries between 1981 and 2001, have shown that people in Muslim countries share broadly the same views on political participation as people in the West. What they disagree strongly about is gender equality and sexual liberalization.

In the United States the distinction is not as sharply drawn. Conservative Muslims are not the only religious group here opposed to what they see as sexual license; it's their opposition to Israel and US foreign policy, not their sexual politics, that sets American Muslims apart from the rest of the right. But in Europe, acceptance of gender equality and homosexuality have become core values across the political spectrum, said Jocelyne Cesari, a Harvard research associate and the author of *When Islam and Democracy Meet*. "Here it is part of a national debate that doesn't involve immigrants only," Cesari said. "In Europe, this is seen as proof that Muslims are still outsiders whose values are in contradiction to ours."

Islamist thinkers have often argued that women are the key to culture, since they have the responsibility of raising children. An emerging coalition of European feminist and anti-immigration forces seems to be adopting the same view. In France, Belgium, Germany and Scandinavia, as in the Netherlands, the "woman question" is at the center of the debate over how to integrate the Muslim community. "I know most of my Muslim friends will disagree with me, but in my opinion the gender issue is the most important issue," says Martijn de Koning, an anthropologist at Leiden University who studies jihadi groups. "The head scarf, the Islamic schools, the policy of family reunification—every debate here more or less concerns the position of women."

Hirsi Ali is only the most prominent of a number of young Muslim women who have lately begun to criticize their own communities for their treatment of women. In Sweden, Fadime Sahindal campaigned against forced marriages before her father killed her in 2002 for having a relationship with a Swedish man. In France, Fadela Amara heads the Ni Putes ni Soumises ("Neither Whores nor Submissives") movement against Islamist groups she calls "the green fascists." In Germany, where six honor killings have taken place just this year, Seyran Ates, a Berlin-based lawyer, has charged the government with allowing Islamic fundamentalism to flourish under a policy of false tolerance.

In the United States, too, some of the Islamists' most vigorous opponents have been female. Asra Nomani, a former *Wall Street Journal* reporter, and Amina Wadud, a professor of Islamic studies, have led the fight to open Muslim prayers to women. Most of the members of the newly formed Progressive Muslim Union, which aims to provide liberal Muslims with a platform, are women, according to co-founder Ahmed Nassef.

Many conservative Muslims have been almost as hostile to these female critics as they have been to Hirsi Ali. As with Hirsi Ali, they tend to disregard the women as deviants who want to change Islamic sexual mores because of their personal failure to live up to them. Nomani, who bore a son out of wedlock, was expelled from her hometown mosque in Morgantown, West Virginia. She and Wadud received death threats and condemnation from religious authorities around the Muslim world for organizing a female-led prayer service in March in New York.

But particularly in Europe, some Islamists are beginning to see the woman question as their Achilles' heel. The influential Swiss Islamist Tariq Ramadan recently warned Muslims that they were going to have to change their attitudes. "We are going through a reassessment," he said, "and the most important subject is women. Our experience in Europe has made it clear that we must speak about equality." In Austria in April, a meeting of 160 imams called for equality between men and women.

But talk may not be enough, at this point. In *Human Visas*, a new book that probably points in the direction Europe is going, Norwegian journalist and human rights activist Hege Storhaug argues that strict controls on immigration are the best way to protect European values and Muslim women's rights. Storhaug, the information director of Human Rights Service, says that Europe's concept of Muslim integration used to amount to "Get the father a job and integration will follow." The new motto, she says, should be "Integrate the mother and two-thirds of the job is done, because the mother will integrate the children."

Storhaug says that to dry up radical Islam, European governments need to break up the "parallel societies" Muslims have established in cities across the continent. Older men in these communities prevent integration by controlling marriages. "The families are under tremendous pressure to bring relatives from the

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home country to Europe," she said. "Relatives are willing to pay a lot for those residency visas. Especially with young immigrant brides, they become completely dependent on their husbands and in-laws. Young women who are born in Norway are forced to marry cousins who can then come to this country." She says that in the ninety such forced marriages her group studied, all but three of the brides said they had been raped.

Denmark has been widely criticized for passing a law in 2002 establishing a number of tests for citizens or residents who wish to bring spouses into the country from overseas: Both partners must be at least 24 years old. They must demonstrate that the marriage is voluntary. They must have a certain income and own a residence with at least two rooms. And they must show a stronger connection to Denmark than to any other country. As a result, the number of people from outside the European Union who were allowed to join Danish spouses or other close family members fell from 10,950 in 2001 to 3,835 last year. In November the Netherlands became the first to follow Denmark's example, raising the age to 21 to qualify for family reunion.

When the Danish measure was proposed, Muslim groups opposed it vigorously. But Storhaug quotes immigrant parents who now say the law has released them from family pressures to use their children as "human visas." And she says young Muslims can continue their education without fear of being married off. "It's rubbish to say the Danish policy is racist," she said. "It's the best policy for women in Europe."

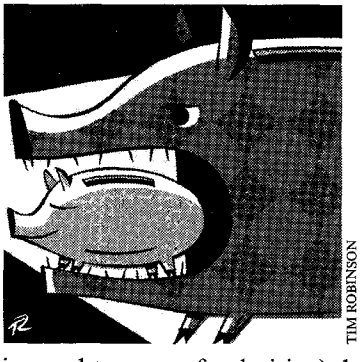
Her group, Human Rights Service, is giving Hirsi Ali its "Bellwether of Europe" prize this month. "I think she is doing a great service to democracy and the future, because Islamism is the biggest threat to democracy and to Europe," she said. ■

LARGE CONTRIBUTORS' IMPORTANCE GREW IN 2004, CONTRARY TO POPULAR PERCEPTION.

The Myth of Small-Donor Clout

NICK NYHART

With few numbers left to crunch, most political dollar tabulators are estimating an overall cost of $4.2 billion for the 2004 election, well above the $3.2 billion for the 2000 cycle. A cursory glance through the analyses of commentators and academics would lead one to believe that a revolution in small-donor fundraising occurred, wresting election funding—and the clout in Washington that goes with it—from the grasp of fat-cat donors. If only that were true. While last year's election saw a notable increase in voter mobilization and turnout, and a rise in participation by small donors, the dirty little secret of American politics in 2004 was the increased importance of big-dollar check writers. Not only did a whopping pile of large "soft money" donations—contributions not regulated by federal law and meant to support general "party building" activities—find its way into the pockets of the 527s (named after a previously obscure crevice of the federal tax code), but the parties and their candidates actually intensified their dependence on the tiny sliver of Americans who wrote them $2,000 checks, the maximum allowed under the new law. Only in Arizona, Maine and North Carolina, where Clean Elections systems offered full public financing to candidates who qualified by raising a large number of $5 contributions, did small donors and average voters really take charge.



TIM ROBINSON

This is not to say that there weren't some important developments at the federal level. In 2003–04, the most notable successes in small-donor fundraising were the early Howard Dean campaign and the late John Kerry campaign. Dean's use of the Internet and direct mail to raise money allowed him to establish a base of small donors—people giving $200 or less—and run ahead of the traditionally funded Democratic field for much of 2003. Kerry, on the other hand, led the "big money primary" early. But once he became the presumptive nominee, the small money rolled in. Before March 1, 2004, Kerry raised 18 percent of his funds in small contributions; from March through August (when he formally became the Democratic nominee and ceased direct fundraising) the percentage increased to 40 percent.

Meanwhile, over at the Democratic National Committee, chairman Terry McAuliffe launched an unprecedented drive to win contributions from small donors—the kind the GOP had wooed successfully for years. His efforts caused such contributions to rise to new levels, and Democrats pulled ahead of their counterparts in this regard. But at the same time, McAuliffe deepened the party's dependence on large-dollar contributors. Under his tenure the party's heavy hitters nearly quadrupled their hard-money largesse and the small-donor slice of giving shrank from 53 percent to 46 percent of the total. Here are the hard facts: In 2000 small donors (those giving $200 or less) gave $58.8 million out of a total of $110.8 million raised from individuals by the DNC. In 2004 contributions from small donors amounted to $165.2 million out of $355.6 million. In other words, as the DNC sought to make up for the loss of soft-money giving to the national parties—which the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA) of 2002 banned—it was the larger donors giving as much as $2,000, not the smaller ones, who expanded their relative importance to the party.

While it may appear to some in Washington that a $2,000 check writer is not a "large donor," to the vast majority of

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Americans—who make less than $50,000 a year and who rarely, if ever, make even a modest campaign contribution—such donations are another confirmation that the US electoral system is dominated by the wealthy, whose interests are protected by elected officials. And unfortunately, McAuliffe's expanded reliance on big-dollar, hard-money contributors is more representative of the political money picture in the 2004 elections than is the grassroots fundraising by both the Dean and Kerry campaigns.

Bundlers' Paradise

Both major presidential candidates smashed existing private fundraising records by relying heavily on sophisticated bundling operations in addition to their activist base. Bush raised $293 million and Kerry $252 million; in 2000 Bush raised $126 million and Gore just $49 million. A relatively small group of money brokers—a thousand or so men and a few women known as Rangers and Pioneers on the Bush team and as vice-chairs and co-chairs on the Kerry team—worked hard to organize givers able to donate at the maximum level of $4,000 per couple. On the Republican side, these mega-donors may have garnered far fewer headlines than the Swift Boat Veterans, but their impact on government policy has been far more significant. For example, Bush's bundlers brought in nearly $25 million from the finance, insurance and real estate sector, which has profited mightily from his tax cuts and stands to make billions more if he succeeds in privatizing Social Security.

And while soft-money giving to the national parties is over, the 527 committees are indeed the new depository for unlimited donations; such groups raised and spent just over $500 million in the last election cycle, according to the Center for Public Integrity. That's almost five times what flowed through 527s in 2000 but about the same amount the soft-money donors gave to the parties in that cycle. While some of those mega-donors dropped out of the campaign finance game in the wake of BCRA's passage, it appears others stepped in to pick up the slack.

The relative unimportance of small contributors in federal campaigns is even more striking in Congressional races. For the first time, the cost of winning a House seat averaged more than a million dollars, while a Senate victory cost more than half again as much as it did in the last comparable cycle (two years previously). Again, the need for new money was met more by an expansion in large checks than by small dollars. For both House and Senate candidates, as well as the four Republican and Democratic party committees that support their campaigns, the share of money represented by donors of less than $200 declined.

At the state level, more records were broken—and not just in big-money bellwether states like California, where the spending on one State Assembly race hit $9.9 million and on another hit $9.5 million. In Indiana two competing gubernatorial candidates together spent more than $28 million. In Missouri three gubernatorial candidates spent a total of nearly $25.5 million, up significantly from the $19 million the governor's race cost four years before. Two candidates for the Indiana Statehouse each spent close to $1 million. As for the role of small contributions, Ed Bender, executive director of the Montana-based Institute on Money in State Politics, says, "With the preliminary data we have now, we're not seeing a surge of small donations in state legislative races compared to 2000."

The bottom line? While it's possible that a few candidates in high-profile national or state races will harness the small-donor potential demonstrated by Dean and Kerry, without more comprehensive reform than we have seen to date, the rising cost of campaigns will continue to insure that many good people avoid running for office, wealthy special interests continue to purchase special influence, many incumbents run essentially unchallenged and the principle of one-person, one-vote is further drained of meaning.

Some in Washington are now focused on trying to craft legislation that would force all spending in federal elections to be paid for with hard money, thus shutting down the unlimited giving to 527s. One problem with this is that there is no easy way to distinguish between legitimate independent political activity by established issue-based organizations (for example, NARAL or the NRA) and that of groups created specifically to influence one campaign (the Swift Boat Veterans or Texans for Truth). As partisans on both sides of the aisle continue to institutionalize their 527 operations, this problem will only worsen.

A Different Path in the States

But even if 527s were reined in, we'd still have an imbalanced system in which meetings in the salons of the rich and powerful matter more than those in the kitchens of average Americans. The good news is that a viable alternative exists: full public financing for candidates who abjure all private contributions apart from a large number of small, qualifying donations from voters in their district, as is the case in Maine, Arizona and North Carolina. Public dollar matches for small givers like the 4-to-1 system of matching contributions in New York City can accomplish many of the same goals.

In Maine a whopping 83 percent of the State Senate and 77 percent of the State House is now made up of legislators who ran "clean." In Arizona a total of forty-six candidates for the state legislature and all four successful candidates for corporation commission—which regulates powerful business interests—were elected running "clean." In both states, the numbers have gone up since 2002. And this past year North Carolina became the first state in the country to offer candidates for top judicial offices (Supreme Court and Court of Appeals) substantial public funding for their races. Both Supreme Court seats and two of the three state Court of Appeals seats up for election were won by candidates who ran with public financing.

The overall number of candidates in Maine's primaries was up 12 percent, giving voters many more choices. "There's a number of people who could not afford to have run had it not been for the Clean Election Act," Republican Robert Haggett, a publicly financed candidate for the State House, told the Maine *Sunday Telegram* last year. Democrat Richard Rhames said he could have run with private funding, but "whether I could run a so-called credible campaign is another thing, [because] my pocket is not that deep."

In Arizona the availability of Clean Elections funding has expanded opportunities for minority and women candidates, and it has expanded public participation in the funding process

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itself. An analysis by the Arizona Clean Elections Institute found that the pool of small donors who gave $5 qualifying contributions to gubernatorial candidates running in 2002 was far more diverse geographically, economically and ethnically than was the case for candidates relying on private contributions.

Next Steps

The road ahead for reformers in a conservative-dominated Washington will be difficult. Proposals to revitalize the Federal Election Commission, retool the out-of-date presidential public financing system and regulate 527 soft money will enjoy no easy ride in a Congress dominated by the likes of Bill Frist and Tom DeLay. That's because these party leaders, and their respective party caucuses, have an all-too-cozy arrangement with their many corporate sponsors, and this year they are moving rapidly to deliver on their donors' investments by enacting harsh changes in bankruptcy law, tough restrictions on the rights of injured parties to sue for redress, multibillion-dollar subsidies to the energy sector and a host of other special-interest tax giveaways. If anything, the greatest opportunity for reformers is to highlight the costs of the current system to average Americans rather than to try to pass severely compromised reforms—the most that is likely in this Big Money Congress.

However, state and local-level opportunities to implement new systems of publicly financed elections are increasing. In Portland, Oregon, the City Council recently passed a "clean" system for city offices. In Connecticut, where former Republican governor John Rowland was recently sentenced to jail time for a series of "pay to play" legal violations, a majority of lawmakers support a Clean Elections–style system. The state's new governor, Jodi Rell, eager to make the state's rash of political scandals a thing of the past, has indicated her support for a public financing solution for all state offices. In West Virginia a panel of state legislators recommended adoption of a pilot program of publicly financed elections for future legislative sessions. In Hawaii, Maryland, Minnesota and Montana state reformers are also making significant progress.

In New Jersey a pilot Clean Elections program covering a handful of state legislative districts takes effect this year. In New Mexico candidates for the state Public Regulation Commission will have the option of Clean Money financing for the coming cycle, and reformers there are trying to cover judicial elections next. Grassroots Internet giant MoveOn.org and other powerful "e-groups" like Democracy for America have begun to make their presence felt in key public financing battles, and leading constituency organizations, from the Sierra Club to the NAACP to the Service Employees International Union, have backed the policy as well. Reformers are now considering a new possibility: that the larger coalitions forged through victories in smaller states could be duplicated in a larger state with more national impact, such as California or New York.

The problem of big money dominating politics will likely get worse in the next few years. But in the longer term, public financing victories outside the Beltway demonstrate the value and promise of reforms that put ordinary citizens in the driver's seat. While national politicians bid up the cost of winning office and come to depend more on elite dollars for their success, the Clean Elections systems that are spreading offer a sensible alternative and a critical contrast. The road to success in Washington travels through the states. ■

MORE THAN EVER BEFORE, U.S. ACTIVISTS ARE INVOKING INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS.

Bringing Human Rights Home

ALAN JENKINS AND LARRY COX

On March 1 the Supreme Court ruled 5 to 4 that the Constitution forbids executing juvenile offenders. In putting to death people who were minors when they committed their crime, the majority noted, "The United States now stands alone in a world that has turned its face against the juvenile death penalty." In a strongly worded dissent, Justice Antonin Scalia attacked the majority's consideration of laws and practices outside the United States, saying that the consensus of "like-minded foreigners" had no bearing in understanding our own Constitution. One month later, in a speech to the American Society of International Law, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg responded that US courts should pay more attention, not less, to international norms. She added that "the notion that it is improper to look beyond the borders of the United States in grappling with hard questions has a certain kinship to the view that the US Constitution is a document essentially frozen in time as of the date of its ratification."

TIM ROBINSON

The increasingly noisy debate on the High Court over the proper role of international standards of justice in our domestic law and policy reflects a broader development that is gaining momentum around the country: Human rights are coming home. Advocates are discovering how the fight for justice and freedom here can be waged through human rights, the international ethical and legal standards that the United States helped to create more than fifty-five years ago

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and that it is officially committed to respect and uphold. In so doing, this emerging human rights movement is forced to confront deliberate, longstanding and nonpartisan policies aimed at insuring that human rights are reserved for external use only.

Unlike many governments, the United States never underestimated the power of human rights. Led by Eleanor Roosevelt, this country played a critical role in the adoption, on December 10, 1948, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which for the first time bound all governments to a common standard of conduct. Ever since then the United States has invoked human rights standards, often aggressively if highly selectively, to criticize other governments.

Yet from the very beginning, leaders from both political parties sought to insure that the human rights the United States championed abroad could never be employed as instruments of change at home. One concern was the possibility that the Declaration's recognition of economic and social rights—the right to a job, education, adequate food, shelter and healthcare—could be used to expose the large holes in the US social safety net. The driving fear, however, was the threat that human rights standards posed to the system of US racial apartheid. Even the treaty against genocide, adopted at about the same time as the Declaration, was blocked successfully by Southern politicians because of its potential use in the fight against lynching in the United States. As Professor Carol Anderson documents in her book *Eyes Off the Prize*, one of Eleanor Roosevelt's less celebrated roles was to work against any enforcement powers for UN human rights bodies and thus assure Southern Democrats that racial segregation had nothing to fear from human rights.

From the beginning, US politicians sought to insure that human rights could never be employed as instruments of change at home.

Under a deal made by the Eisenhower Administration, the United States would for forty years refuse to ratify a single one of the human rights treaties it had helped to inspire. When some treaties, such as the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, were finally ratified in the 1990s it was with the explicit condition that, absent specific legislation, these treaties could not be enforced in domestic courts. This policy of "US exceptionalism" effectively deterred civil rights and social justice organizations from taking advantage of the language, laws, methodologies, mechanisms, possible alliances and unifying vision offered by the international human rights framework and movement. American-based human rights organizations put most of their focus on every country except the United States, thus reinforcing the view that human rights were of relevance only to other countries.

In recent years, however, social justice activists, public interest attorneys and even federal judges have begun to discover human rights—and to bring them home. One promising development is the recent creation of the US Human Rights Network, a membership group that already includes more than 150 mostly community-based organizations. The network is dedicated to promoting US accountability to universal human rights standards, connecting domestic social justice movements with international movements for human rights, and building a "human rights culture" in America ("Something Inside So Strong," the network's resource guide, is available at www.ushrnetwork.org).

In San Francisco, WILD for Human Rights has been pioneering in its use of a human rights framework. WILD (Women's Institute for Leadership Development) led a highly creative campaign that convinced the City Council in 1998 to adopt the international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as part of its municipal law and to conduct a "gender analysis" of city operations to determine their impact on women. The campaign included organizing a public hearing in which residents who had experienced discrimination and community leaders testified about the practical impact that adopting CEDAW would have. The ordinance that emerged required the city not only to refrain from discriminating itself but also to "take all appropriate measures" to prevent discrimination by others—including gender-based violence—within the city. An analysis of the Department of Public Works, for example, led to new, nontraditional employment opportunities for women and more streetlights in unsafe neighborhoods. And in El Paso, Texas, the Border Network for Human Rights, which works to curb abuses against immigrants, has had similar success with a human rights approach. Within a year of adopting such a strategy, the network had established ten local Committees for the Defense of Human Rights, with more than 250 families as members.

These activists join groups, like the Indian Law Resource Center and the Center for Constitutional Rights, that have long used human rights principles in the legal context. And they mirror a change in the way that international human rights organizations based in the United States think about their own country's obligations. Global Rights, for example, is a twenty-five-year-old human rights group with offices around the world. Its work now includes the United States, with a focus on protecting the rights of migrant farm and domestic workers, addressing racial disparities in criminal justice and promoting the right to equal education. Human Rights Watch, too, has turned its attention to the domestic context, exposing violations of workers' rights in meatpacking and other industries.

Also spurring the nation's tentative steps toward embracing human rights is the work of scholars in the legal academy. At the University of Chicago Law School, Cass Sunstein is forcefully making the case that the notion of economic human rights is a part of our nation's political, legal and cultural legacy. His recent book *The Second Bill of Rights* details how much of the international human rights system flowed from the US experience of the Great Depression, as well as from core American values of freedom and human dignity. Just as legal scholars like Charles Hamilton Houston laid the theoretical groundwork for the rebirth of the equal protection clause in *Brown v. Board of Education* a half-century ago, so Sunstein and others are developing and testing the bases for human rights to assume their proper role in US law.

This legal movement is beginning to bear fruit—notably through some recent Supreme Court decisions. Over the past two decades the Rehnquist Court has rolled back a range of constitutional and civil rights protections. Yet in several landmark cases

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during its last two terms, the Court has vindicated fundamental freedoms, based partly on international human rights principles.

In *Lawrence v. Texas*, in which it protected consensual gay sexuality as within Americans' right to privacy, the Court cited a European Court of Human Rights decision as persuasive authority. In its decision upholding affirmative action as a tool for advancing diversity and addressing discrimination, Justice Ginsburg cited the convention against racial discrimination in her concurring opinion. In holding that executing people with mental retardation constitutes cruel and unusual punishment, the Court looked, in part, to international practices and standards of decency. And in its recent decision overturning the juvenile death penalty, the Court found relevant that every country save the United States and Somalia had ratified the international Convention on the Rights of the Child, which outlaws the practice.

These legal references have not gone unnoticed by critics of US human rights. House Republicans have introduced a resolution declaring that the "meaning of the Constitution of the United States should not be based on judgments, laws, or pronouncements of foreign institutions unless such foreign judgments, laws or pronouncements inform an understanding of the original meaning of the Constitution of the United States." A similar resolution has been introduced in the Senate.

In several recent landmark decisions, the Court has vindicated fundamental freedoms based in part on human rights principles.

What difference would it make if we in the United States began to take human rights seriously? Certainly, constitutional rights are central to our democracy. But reinvigorating a human rights culture alongside our constitutional one would advance American values of opportunity, fairness and dignity that have languished in recent years.

Think of what it would mean to the 45 million Americans without health insurance if the United States respected the right to "the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health" contained in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In South Africa, since a landmark Constitutional Court ruling, the right to health has meant that low-income, HIV-positive women who are pregnant have had access to antiretroviral drugs to prevent transmission of the virus to their newborn babies. We can only imagine what the trajectory of the HIV/AIDS epidemic might have been in the United States if we had made human rights principles central to our early response.

And consider our nation's criminal justice policies. In 2002, for the first time in our history, the nation's prison and jail population exceeded 2 million people—almost two-thirds of whom are people of color. Yet when the Supreme Court heard a 1987 case asserting that race played a determinative role in who receives the death penalty in Georgia, it assumed the accuracy of that claim, then went on to rule that this form of unequal protection did not violate the Constitution. In contrast, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination—which President Johnson signed in 1966 and the Senate ratified in 1994—requires governments to eliminate and redress "any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise on an equal footing of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, or any other field of public life." There is no question that Georgia's racially biased use of the death penalty violated that standard, which focuses on government's obligation to remedy injustice rather than a defendant's obligation to prove individual discriminatory intent.

Just as social justice at home suffers in the absence of respect for human rights, the cost of US exceptionalism to our credibility abroad is immeasurable. It is especially great at a time when our government is pursuing the hearts and minds of the world's nations to combat global terrorism. Moreover, legitimate US criticism of countries like China and North Korea for human rights violations is unlikely to get a fair hearing when the United States has renounced its own treaty obligations to respect the rights of Guantánamo Bay prisoners under the Third Geneva Convention. Until it was recently rebuked by the Supreme Court, the Bush Administration asserted the right to imprison US citizens indefinitely as "enemy combatants" without charging them with a crime and without affording them access to impartial review or an attorney; it still claims the authority to subject foreign nationals to such treatment. The United States has properly called for international action to address the human rights catastrophe in the Darfur region of Sudan. Yet it tried to "unsign" the International Criminal Court treaty, which was designed to address precisely that kind of gross human rights violation.

To be sure, human rights are no magic bullet. Many countries have signed and ratified all the major human rights instruments, then routinely ignored them. Bringing human rights home to the United States would spur debate, disagreement and dissent. But whatever the leanings of the leaders in power at any given time, Americans have a tradition of respect for the rule of law. Government officials would oppose rights enforcement when inconvenient or embarrassing, and judges would disagree about the fundamental meaning of various human rights—just as they do with constitutional rights. But ultimately, they would be our law and could be enforced in ways that would change lives at home and be an inspiration abroad.

There is no question that international human rights remain a foreign concept today in many—perhaps most—communities around the United States. Yet they are no more foreign than the right to vote was in Mississippi before courageous civil rights activists and ordinary people began standing up to hatred and violence in an organized way. They are no more foreign than the right to a safe and legal abortion was in Texas when reproductive rights activists began laying the groundwork for *Roe v. Wade*. They are no more foreign than the right to organize for decent working conditions was in the auto plants of Detroit or the mines of West Virginia before workers took up that cause in mass numbers. That the right to vote, the right to organize and the right to reproductive freedom are under attack right now emphasizes the challenge facing all those who care about social justice, as well as the new energy and direction that human rights can bring to those struggles. ■

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THE IDEA THAT WEALTH SHOULD BENEFIT THE COMMUNITY IS BECOMING COMMONPLACE.

The New Ownership Society

GAR ALPEROVITZ

Just beneath the surface of conventional media concern, the groundwork is quietly being laid for a powerful new strategic initiative: a progressive "ownership society." Traditional liberal approaches may be blocked for the moment at the national level, but there are increasing openings for serious action at the state and local levels, with longer-term nationwide implications. What is striking is that the idea that wealth should benefit the community directly is quietly becoming a commonplace. This community-oriented concept is the polar opposite of the Bush ownership principle that wealth should be concentrated among individuals (especially those at the top).

TIM ROBINSON

The alternative idea—a community-benefiting ownership strategy—takes a variety of forms. At one level are enterprises largely or entirely owned by employees who live in the communities in which those enterprises are located. At another are community-building neighborhood corporations. At still another level are nonprofit efforts that undertake economic activity to support community-service missions. Beyond these are publicly owned enterprises that provide jobs and services but also make money for cash-starved local municipalities. Still other efforts include large numbers of cooperatives, community land trusts and hybrid community-oriented economic efforts. Moreover, a number of public-pension and other investment strategies either help nonprofit efforts (especially in housing) or contribute to local community finances by strengthening the local tax base. Some invest in worker-owned companies.

Virtually all these approaches differ from traditional social programs in that they do not depend primarily on taxing and spending—at a time when the ever-deepening fiscal crisis will continue to constrain traditional strategies. Many also anchor jobs firmly in local communities—at a time when globalization and runaway corporations threaten local economic stability.

The least well known of the efforts involves municipalities. The massive Bush-era cutbacks in federal funding now hitting the cities and states have dramatically increased pressures on mayors of both parties to explore new sources of revenue for public services. One of the most important involves real estate. As early as 1970 the City of Boston embarked on a joint venture with the Rouse Company to develop the Faneuil Hall Marketplace, the downtown retail complex. Boston kept the property under municipal ownership and negotiated a lease agreement through which the city secured a portion of the development's profits in lieu of property taxes. By the mid-1980s Boston was collecting some $2.5 million per year from the Marketplace. One expert estimate is that Boston took in 40 percent more revenue than it would have collected through conventional property-tax channels.

Entrepreneurial "participating lease" arrangements for the use of publicly owned property are now common in many parts of the country, including New York, Los Angeles and Washington, DC. Under such leases a developer pays the public landlord both a yearly base rent and an additional amount pegged to project performance. The principle at work is similar to the one private developers commonly use in shopping-center leasing: The more money the developer makes, the higher the rent.

Land development is "old economy." A fast-growing arena of new activity involves Internet and related services. In Glasgow, Kentucky, the municipally owned utility offers residents electricity, cable, telephone services and high-speed Internet access—all at costs lower than private competitors. The city also has access to an Intranet, which links local government, businesses, libraries, schools and neighbors. In 2003 the municipality offered a package of eighty digital cable channels for $19.95 a month. More than 350 communities, including Tacoma, Washington, and Cedar Falls, Iowa, have built or are planning networks like the one in Glasgow.

Hundreds of municipalities generate revenues through landfill gas-recovery, which turns the greenhouse gas methane (a byproduct of waste storage) into energy. Riverview, Michigan, one of the largest such recovery operations, illustrates the trend: In the mid-1980s Riverview contracted with DTE Biomass to build a gas-recovery facility at its Riverview Land Preserve. Power production from the gas brings in more than 40,000 megawatt hours of electricity per year. Riverview's royalties covered the costs of the first two years of operation and now add to the city's cash flows. Other innovative and successful methane recovery operations are run by the states of Illinois and South Carolina and by Los Angeles County and the city of Portland, Oregon.

It is often held that public ownership is inherently inefficient. Studies of municipal electric utilities belie this view. One out of seven Americans—about 43 million people—relies on power from the 2,010 public utilities now operating. Although the majority of publicly owned systems are in smaller communities, they are also found in large urban areas like Los Angeles, San Antonio and Memphis. Residential customers of investor-owned utilities (IOUs) commonly pay electricity rates roughly 10 percent higher than those paid by public power customers. Commercial IOU customers pay rates 7 percent higher. Industry studies establish that most of public power's price advantage is due to the fact of public ownership itself: Locally controlled public utilities can be especially responsive to customers' needs and do not need to pay dividends to private shareholders.

The basic principle at work in municipally owned real estate

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development is that appreciation of land should be turned to public advantage. Community land trusts help produce stable and affordable housing for low- and moderate-income residents. One of the earliest and most influential is the Burlington (Vermont) Community Land Trust, organized with bipartisan support when an early-1980s economic boom caused housing costs to spiral out of reach for many long-term residents. Land is owned by BCLT and leased to homeowners. Member-residents devote no more than 30 percent of their income to rents or mortgages. Those benefiting from the resulting low costs sign contracts agreeing that future housing resale prices will not increase beyond a certain percentage, thereby allowing other low- and moderate-income families to benefit from BCLT's efforts.

Most of the new strategies have enjoyed unusual support that transcends traditional left-right divisions.

If municipal ownership is the least well known of the various strategies, perhaps the most widely understood involves the neighborhood-benefiting corporation. There are now anywhere from 4,000 to 6,000 community development corporations (CDCs), up from a mere handful three to four decades ago.

In its first ten years of operation the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation (BSRC), founded in 1967 in Brooklyn, New York, provided start-up capital and other assistance to 116 new businesses, helped create 3,300 jobs, arranged training programs or new jobs for 7,000 local residents and renovated or built some 650 new housing units. Another large effort is New Community Corporation in Newark, New Jersey, a CDC established after the 1967 riot left twenty-three dead and more than 1,000 injured. NCC now owns about $500 million in real estate and other ventures, including a shopping center and more than 3,000 housing units. NCC enterprises employ 2,300 neighborhood residents and create $50 million to $75 million in economic activity each year. Profits help operate daycare and after-school programs, a nursing home and four daycare centers for seniors. Proceeds from business activities support job training, educational, health and other programs.

Most CDCs are much smaller; the asset-building efforts they concentrate on primarily involve affordable housing and small-business development. What is striking is that CDCs have received broad bipartisan backing and new alliances of support at both the national and local levels. Louis Winnick of the Institute for Public Administration offers this explanation of the appeal: "The anti-statist Right saluted community development as a proxy for government.... On the opposite end of the ideological spectrum, radical activists envisioned community-based organizations as weapons of political empowerment, instruments to liberate the poor from chronic neglect."

A closely related community-benefiting ownership strategy involves nonprofit organizations that in part support public services through business efforts. A 2001 *Chronicle of Philanthropy* study estimated that more than $60 billion was earned from business activities by the 14,000 largest nonprofits in 1998. Income from fees, charges and related business activities is estimated in other studies to have grown from 13 percent of nonprofit social-service-organization revenues in 1977 to 28 percent in 1997 [see Michael H. Shuman and Merrian Fuller, "Profits for Justice," January 24].

A case in point is Esperanza Unida (EU) in Milwaukee, an organization that initially focused on helping Latino workers deal with workplace issues and file unemployment and workers' compensation claims. In the early 1980s EU began running businesses with a dual mission: training and generating funds for other operations. With what came to be called the "Training Business Model," EU now employs local citizens in enterprises involved in auto repair, construction, printing, childcare, customer service skills and welding. It also runs a coffeehouse/bookstore, ¿Que Pasa?, that hosts community events and offers books and periodicals in Spanish and English. Roughly 50–70 percent of EU's annual revenue comes from its business activities.

Still another strategy is exemplified by W.L. Gore, the maker of Gore-Tex apparel, one of the most impressive of the modern employee-owned enterprises. The company, owned since 1974 by worker-owners (currently 6,000) in forty-five locations around the world, has no "bosses" or formal titles. To insure communication and innovation, those working at any one site number no more than 200. Depending on their skills, workers may lead one task one week and follow other leaders the next week; teams disband after projects are completed, with team members moving on to other teams. W.L. Gore revenues totaled $1.35 billion in the last fiscal year; the firm regularly ranks on the *Fortune* "Best Companies to Work For" list (it was number two on the list this January).

Employee ownership can come about in different ways. Appleton Company in Appleton, Wisconsin (specialty paper production), became employee-owned when the company was put up for sale by the multinational corporation that owned it—and the 2,600 employees decided they had just as much right to buy it as anyone else. Reflexite, an optics company based in New Avon, Connecticut, became employee-owned in 1985 after 3M made a bid for it and the founding owners, loyal to their workers and the town, preferred to sell to the employees instead.

There are now an estimated 11,500 companies in the United States substantially or totally owned by the people who work for them, up from a mere handful thirty-five years ago. Indeed, more workers—roughly 10 million—are now involved in such efforts than are members of unions in the private sector! Most companies are organized through employee stock ownership plans (ESOPs), a legal arrangement that enjoys special tax benefits encouraging employee ownership. Most important, enterprises owned by employees are powerfully anchored in their communities. They are far less likely to move, a fact of increasing importance as the United States moves deeper into the era of globalization. Anchored firms help maintain local jobs and the local tax base, and thus finances for local public services.

Various federal and state programs backing such companies have also already received broad bipartisan support. Jeff Gates, a former Senate aide who helped write much of modern ESOP legislation, recalls, "The political potential in this area became

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obvious to me when, over the span of a two-week period...I was asked to provide speech material for both Republican Senator Jesse Helms and Democratic presidential candidate Jesse Jackson."

The most far-reaching of the community-benefiting wealth- and asset-oriented strategies are those operating at the state level. Public pension funds of the kind recently reported on in depth in these pages by William Greider now regularly seek ways to enhance local economic health [see "The New Colossus," February 28]. More than half the states have also established economically targeted investment (ETI) programs to focus a portion of investment in ways that help local communities.

CalPERS, the California Public Employees' Retirement System, oversees more than $186 billion in pension funds for 1.4 million employees, retirees and survivors. In addition to investing part of its funds to help local communities, CalPERS maintains a domestic portfolio "focus list," which singles out poorly performing companies and companies with poor governance practices. The results are illuminating: Companies that have been singled out in a particular year have outperformed the Standard & Poor's 500 by roughly 14 percent in the five years after CalPERS has drawn attention to their failings.

Alabama—a conservative state where fiscal pressures are intense and traditional tax proposals are commonly blocked—is also pursuing wealth-related strategies. Retirement Systems of Alabama has invested in numerous state industries, ranging from aerospace to tourism development to state-backed Ginnie Mae mortgages. RSA, which has $23 billion under management, has also helped form two media conglomerates involving hundreds of local newspapers and thirty-six television and radio stations. Stock in these is jointly owned by RSA and the employees of the companies.

We may add two further strategies to this listing: First, more than half the states now have venture capital programs in which the state invests in promising companies, commonly taking back public ownership of stock. Second is the traditional co-op, an institution far more prevalent than many realize. There are more than 48,000 in the United States, with 115 million members. Ten thousand credit unions (total assets: more than $600 billion) supply financial services to 84 million members; 37 million Americans purchase their electricity from rural electric cooperatives; and approximately 30 percent of farm products are marketed through cooperatives.

The emerging direction is not without challenges. Those seeking more far-reaching change rightly continue to urge much greater democratization of CDCs, worker-owned firms and other wealth-related institutions, and nonprofits must continue to struggle with the conflict between service goals and economic support activity. On the other hand, most of the strategies have enjoyed unusual support that transcends traditional left-right divisions—above all because at the local level, practical solutions to problems matter far more than ideological rhetoric, even to conservative Republicans. Mayors of both parties have abandoned free-market slogans to embrace strategies offering concrete answers to growing fiscal problems.

The stage, in fact, is now set for significant advances in policy development and progressive strategy. Two factors suggest that a major breakthrough is possible over the coming decade: the expanding fiscal crisis at all levels of government, and the steadily increasing insecurities of the global economic era. The former is already forcing consideration of alternatives that promise new ways to earn service-supporting revenues, directly or indirectly. The latter increasingly highlights the need for strategies that anchor jobs, especially those that improve the local tax base. It remains for progressives (and progressive candidates) to put forward a comprehensive approach that unites the key elements, resting their claim for support on democratic ownership and community-serving principles.

Beyond this lies an additional, longer-term possibility: Many of the programs that became the basis of the New Deal were refined at the state and local levels in earlier years, especially during the 1920s. The progressive ownership society efforts that are bubbling up around the country could well provide the new ideas and content we will need for the next major national push forward when the right moment arrives again. ■

LETTERS
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

rifle stock with a protruding hand grip). Pre-1994 guns and magazines were exempt.

It is the Feinstein ban—not concerns over hunting firearms or background checks—that has driven the gun-owner backlash against Democrats since 1994. Four out of five gun owners are nonhunters, and if Democrats don't stop fighting for bans on every class of civilian guns the prohibitionists tag with a scary label, the backlash at the polls will undoubtedly continue. SHANNON PARKER

Alexandria, Va.

■ Whatever difficulty Democrats encounter these days as proponents of gun control cannot be corrected until they do what the gun-control movement has failed to do, namely, correct the misleading impression that they are anti-gun. Since "anti-gun" implies opposition to private possession of guns, it can hardly be surprising that countless devotees of private gun ownership fear that even minimally stricter controls are incremental steps toward what they imagine is the ultimate aim of gun-control advocacy—the banning of private gun ownership.

Effective advocacy of stricter gun control should include rules that are responsive to the imperatives of public safety and respectful of the rights and needs of skilled, law-abiding, responsible gun owners. Minimum national standards for lawful, responsible access to guns should be subject to additional requirements that states and localities may consider essential. In addition, politicians supporting gun control can stress more than conventional public safety: Strict gun control is indispensable in the "war on terror."

In addition, a well-designed gun-control campaign should do what the private gun owners have failed to do: Make gun ownership a respected source of personal pride. Since guns are as easy to get as hammers and screwdrivers, there is no more pride in owning a firearm than in owning a hammer or screwdriver. Law-abiding, responsible gun owners, obeying strict controls, should welcome a distinction they'd deserve. DAVID J. STEINBERG

director, 1968–89,
National Council for a
Responsible Firearms Policy

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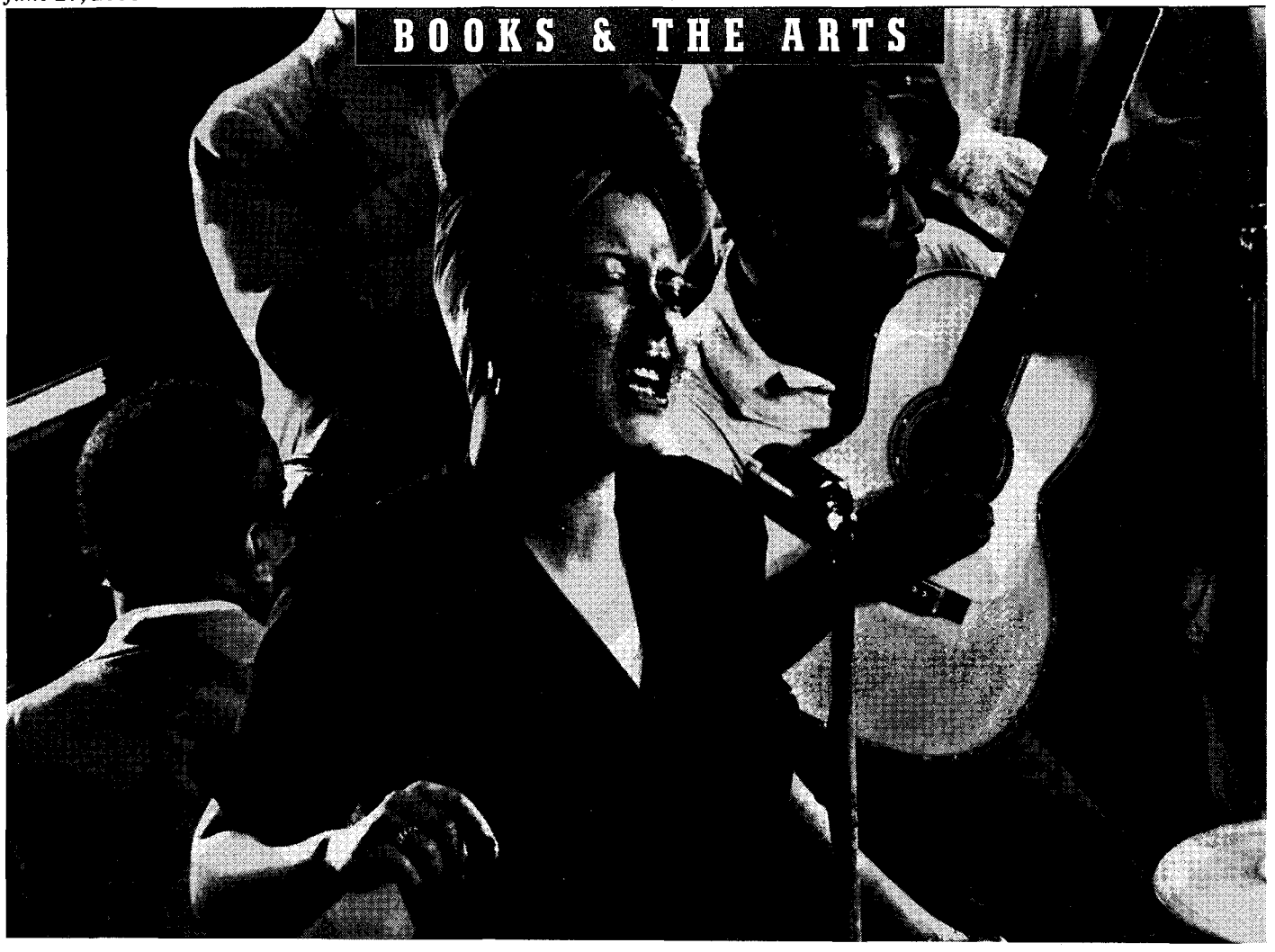
BOOKS & THE ARTS



GETTY IMAGES

The First Lady of Song

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

WITH BILLIE.
By Julia Blackburn.
Pantheon. 354 pp. $25.

As with Frank Sinatra, as with Aretha Franklin, as with Elvis Presley, as with George Jones, as with Nat King Cole, as with Sarah Vaughan, as with Johnny Cash, as with Al Green, as with Kurt Cobain, as with—unfortunately, but it must be said—Snoop Dogg, coming to terms with Billie Holiday means penetrating an unfathomable mystery: her voice. To one extent or another this holds for most good singers, and my list—while politely making room for Vaughan and her gravitas in addition to the odious Dogg—is limited by age, happenstance and personal bias as well as the need to stop somewhere. For instance, it excludes the "classical" tradition, whereas Roland Barthes's seminal 1972 essay "The Grain of the Voice" was inspired by lieder specialist Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, who Barthes reported "reigns more or less unchallenged over the recording of vocal music," as if Billie Holiday, Frank Sinatra and for that matter Edith Piaf had never existed. Nevertheless, it is in popular music, so much less stringent as to technical standards and so much more invested in performer mystique, that grain reigns.

That Billie Holiday was blessed with an extraordinary instrument isn't immediately apparent even to those who admire her. As Henry Pleasants put it, she had "a meager voice—small, hoarse at the bottom and thinly shrill on top, with top

Robert Christgau is senior editor and chief music critic of the Village Voice.

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and bottom never very far apart." And what little she had she wrecked. When I discovered her in 1959, she had died a few months earlier at 43, so like most of my contemporaries, I formed my bond with the Holiday the rock critic Carol Cooper calls "our lady of perpetual suffering." By the mid-1950s, her timbre often cracked and her melodies sometimes staggered, especially on off-label live recordings like the one I bought. If you'd asked me why I liked her, I would have cited her ability to contain pain (only then I would have made the verb a bald and inaccurate "express"), her sly improvisations (which often prove less radical than that truism implies) and her "swing," a concept that like "flow" in hip-hop covers up a myriad of inexactitudes—Holiday's time in particular is a wonder that resists analysis as unflappably as her sound. These were and continue to be the standard answers, and they're all essential to her matchless achievement. But they don't nearly explain her fascination.

Julia Blackburn's fascination with Billie Holiday began when she was 14, at a party thrown by her mother that featured two prostitutes and two people dancing around with their clothes off and an old man giving her the eye and her mother giving the old man the eye. Blackburn "escaped to a far corner" and spent the night playing a 1975 compilation called *A Billie Holiday Memorial*—most of it from the 1930s, the finale from the lush, lost 1958 *Lady in Satin*. Next day she bought the LP, which she's kept ever since. A quarter of a century later, still entranced by "the way her voice could chase out my fears," Blackburn decided to write a book about Holiday. The author of two well-regarded novels and several works of history, she elected to focus not on Holiday's voice but on her life, which for many feels like the closest thing they can get to it. So she contracted with promoter Toby Byron to examine the Linda Kuehl archive: a trove of taped interviews, laborious and sometimes inaccurate transcripts of those tapes, documents, artifacts and slivers of biography previously accessed by Holiday chroniclers Robert O'Meally and Donald Clarke, although Blackburn is the first to examine more than the transcripts. Kuehl assembled this material over many years; her plan to write a definitive biography died when she committed suicide in 1979.

Strangely, Blackburn couldn't write a biography either. Instead, in something like desperation, she assembled portraits of Kuehl's interviewees, and these, added together in all their contradictory subjectivity, constitute her portrait of Holiday. Fortunately for Blackburn, the ploy worked. *With Billie* is a compelling and intelligent book, less in its exposition than in the way it's conceived and assembled. But so are O'Meally's coffee-table "biographical essay" *Lady Day* and Clarke's biography *Wishing on the Moon* and Farah Jasmine Griffin's 2001 *If You Can't Be Free, Be a Mystery: In Search of Billie Holiday*, written without Kuehl because Griffin couldn't afford the fee. All are worth reading, and that is a credit to Holiday's profundity—she's inexhaustible.

Holiday wasn't just adored by her fans but by her friends and colleagues, and the paucity of backbiting is a clue to her greatness.

Lady Day is where to start. O'Meally, a professor of jazz studies and African-American literature at Columbia, concentrates on music and musters the sanest and fullest overview, detailed and perceptive critically and sympathetic psychologically; he never brushes past her personal faults because he believes they're subsumed by her aesthetic virtues. Clarke, a popular-music historian, brings immense factual resources to bear on the most complete picture of Holiday we have. But he's a militant middlebrow, and his confident assertions regarding Holiday's sexuality—she was a "masochist," he avers in a more clinical tone than he has any right to—tempt one to reciprocate ("male chauvinist" who likes the ladies more than they like him). Griffin's polemically black feminist perspective is far less mechanistic than Angela Davis's in *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, and welcome in a field of discourse where, as recently as 1997, Leslie Gourse's twenty-five-contributor *The Billie Holiday Companion* included just one black and two women, including Gourse herself. Griffin is both open-minded and hardheaded, as when she observes that the widely disparaged Diana Ross vehicle *Lady Sings the Blues*, based in theory on Holiday's notoriously inaccurate 1956 as-told-to with William Dufty, inspired a boom in Holiday scholarship extending well beyond the works just cited, thus vastly enriching our understanding of Holiday and her art.

Blackburn's principal contribution to that understanding is a sense of who Holiday's friends were. The interviews about her Baltimore girlhood constitute an oral history of a 1920s ghetto, not such an easy thing to come by; the later materials, which predominate, do the same for the jazz life, which is better documented, and also the sporting life, which is less so. But it's the sum of the documentation that's so impressive. Billie Holiday was a difficult, profane and sometimes imperious woman. She was a junkie and an alcoholic; she had sex with many men and women; she was hot-tempered and ready to clock anyone who gave her grief. Yet the love emanating from these interviews flows never-ending. Holiday wasn't just adored by her fans (to an unusual degree for a non-superstar, although not for what today we call a cult artist); she was adored by her friends and colleagues, and the paucity of backbiting is a clue to her greatness. Most artists are selfish as a way of life, and Holiday would always take what was offered her, especially if it would get her high. But she was also great fun to be around, certainly up till her miserable end and often then, and generous by nature, by which I mean something less showy and manipulative than the impulsive largesse of a Presley or Sinatra. She attracted her circle not with her power or charisma but with her spirit.

To Blackburn's credit, the sporting lifers come through as remarkable individuals: the stepfather who cherished Billie and the stepmother who envied her; the dancer who was her mother's confidante and the good-time girl who was her pharmacist's wife; the pimp and the madam; the two comedians and the five pianists; the white Southern bisexual woman who froze her out and the white Southern homosexual man who propped her up; John Levy the Good who played bass as opposed to John Levy the Evil who played her; the mousy secretary and the slick lawyer who shared her last days; the narc who busted her and still thought he was her friend. Holiday's last husband, Louis McKay, is captured in a brutal taped phone call, and Blackburn adds to Kuehl's roster portraits of spaced-out sweetheart Lester Young and people-collecting bitch Tallulah Bankhead. She also goes on about the irrationality of US narcotics policy, although she argues cogently that Holiday's heroin addiction was less severe than myth would have it—she seemed to kick at will, and even the chief witness for the prosecution, accompanist Carl Drinkard, who clearly

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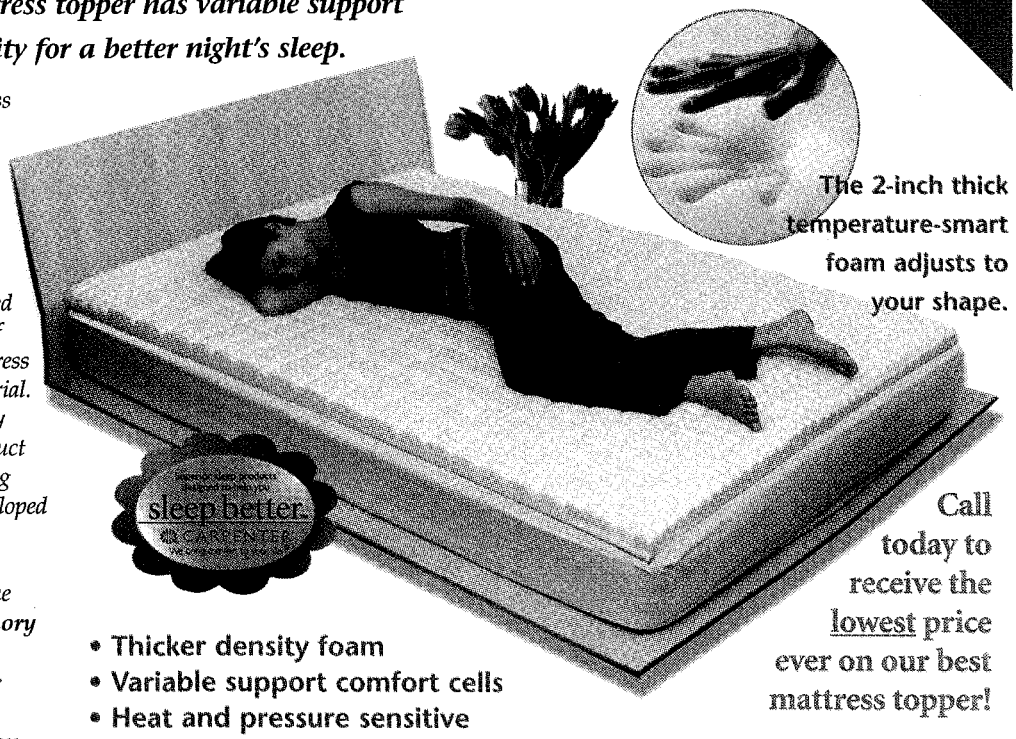

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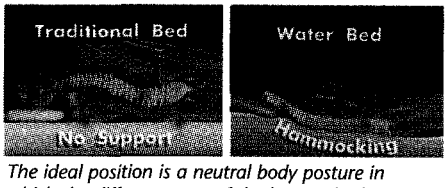

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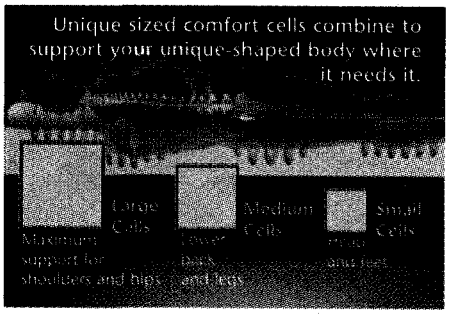
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wanted to believe Holiday was as hopeless a junkie as he was, allows that unlike him she didn't shoot up to get straight: "It was not just to keep from getting sick; she actually enjoyed using drugs." Although many claimed she was only happy singing (and many claimed she didn't believe she could sing), Blackburn's Holiday is a woman who enjoyed a lot of things. As O'Meally concludes, she chose very young to reject the straight world, and she had a ball doing it.

"People don't think I like laughing. They don't think I lead any kind of normal life," Holiday complained to secretary Alice Vrbsky. And she had a right. By 1957 or so, Holiday's circumstances were bleak. She'd lost friends, she hated McKay as she'd come to hate all the other toughs who'd turned her on, and with no manager and an unearned reputation as a no-show, she wasn't getting enough club work, although Norman Granz had been overseeing some of her greatest sessions. But as Blackburn and Griffin insist, our lady of perpetual suffering was a reductive sensationalization based on her 1947 heroin conviction, which was probably a setup. Not that Holiday resisted the cliché the way she might have. Her autobiography cashed in on her notoriety, and because hard living—especially alcohol—had roughed up her instrument and sapped her sass, her late recordings often foreground her pain. Nevertheless, musically and personally, the transmutation of suffering was never all or even most of what Billie Holiday was about. Coming up when I did, I used to share O'Meally's view that the late recordings old-timers disparage were markedly superior to the music of her 20s—in O'Meally's words, "more nuanced and evocative." But listening intensively as I've read these books, I've come to feel not that their vocal attractions are somehow lacking, because her voice almost always comes through, but that they don't laugh enough—even if, as O'Meally makes clear, they laugh more than I could once discern.

An illegitimate child shunned by the striving family that never fully accepted her, Holiday was a bad girl on principle. She was singing for money before she left Baltimore at 13, but for much of her adolescence she also worked as a prostitute. The scant evidence is tantalizingly complex, but from Blackburn and the others it would seem that these two vocations overlapped—that the pimps and players she liked to hang with dug her because she could sing, because she took no shit and because she was a real party girl, none of which meant she didn't need to earn cash on her back. Speaking from the naïve perspective of someone who's never known or patronized a prostitute, I connect this to the mystery of Holiday's voice—a voice that gives its most exquisite pleasure by taking pleasure, just as what defines a quality hooker is her ability to convince her johns that they get her hot (and, who knows, maybe sometimes they do). There's something so casually delighted yet so hip and cool about Holiday's timing, tone and timbre—so willing, yet so impossible to fool.

Casually delighted yet so hip and cool, so willing yet impossible to fool, Holiday gave her most exquisite pleasure by taking pleasure.

The willing part wasn't merely a function of Holiday's soft-edged croon but of her musical attitude. It's invariably said that Holiday torpedoes the banality of the Tin Pan Alley dross she was compelled to sing in the 1930s by transforming the songs' melodies, and one way O'Meally argues for the late work is by laying out how extreme these revisions became. But as Clarke points out more than once, many of the songs were expertly crafted, and as O'Meally emphasizes, Holiday was generally given several to choose from. Moreover, the assumption that to reconceive a melody is to improve it is among other things a rejection of the satisfying structural certitudes in which pop composers specialize—a rejection, that is, of the square world in which things resolve almost but not quite as you'd dreamed. In the 1930s, when she was an optimistic kid—before she turned 25 in 1940, she'd already put in stints with Count Basie and Artie Shaw and altered the course of her career by starting to sing (and climax her sets with) Abel Meeropol's antilynching song-poem "Strange Fruit"—Holiday showed a more nuanced sense of how to keep her johns coming back for more.

Compilations are the efficient way to access a singer in history, and Columbia has cherry-picked a bunch of fine ones, starting with *Lady Day: The Best of Billie Holiday* and *A Fine Romance*. But dip anywhere into the ten-CD *Lady Day: The Complete Billie Holiday on Columbia 1933–1944*—the outtakes, the air checks, the near crap, anywhere—and you will hear first of all not one of the twentieth century's consummate jazz artists but a dynamite pop singer. Zoom in whenever the fancy strikes you and Holiday will certainly be personalizing the tune with her compliant cunning as she enunciates the lyric in her crystalline drawl. Usually the lyric will be faring better than all those accounts of how she undercuts moon-June clichés would have you believe, and usually the tune will be the thing yet not the thing, a crucial pop mode that long preceded Holiday and has been ascendant since the 1970s. But definitely there will be art going on, and definitely it will make your mind go pitter-pat. Lose concentration, however, and your aesthetic emotions will still get a proper workout. Massaged by the unfathomable, they'll give it up to background music.

Please don't think I'm trying to drag Billie Holiday by the gardenia into some quotidian realm she long ago transcended. Every realm is hers, and every good thing people say about her is true. I've learned to love the 1940s Deccas, wish their strings and big bands had gained her the hits she coveted, and I adore the Verves. The *Lady in Autumn* set is the pinnacle of her jazz artistry—evocative and nuanced, breath of my youth and intimation of my mortality. Yet it too shows off Holiday's capacity to give pleasure by taking pleasure. In the 1950s, with narcotics and inebriants eating away at her immense vitality and John Levy the Evil replaced by Big Handsome Spousal Abuser Louis McKay, it's hard to say whether she was an old whore whose skills were second nature or a dedicated artist whose best self emerged in song. Probably both, and whatever the explanation, her spirit remains a gift to anyone who'll let it in.

But her spirit couldn't have soared or penetrated without her voice. Throughout her life this was a feel-good voice, easy to listen to in the sense that 1930s guys used to say a doll was easy to look at. Early on its signal virtue is that despite the thinness Pleasants is right to cite, it's also round, firm, even plump and gorgeous—which by an odd coincidence is pretty much how people recall her beauty in those days. Later on it's started to sag, that burnished glow coarsened a little. Yet what's underneath the skin—the nerve endings, the musculature, the living flesh itself—remains intact. And always it remains a mystery. ■

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The Cool War

BRIAN MORTON

SATCHMO BLOWS UP THE WORLD: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War.
By Penny M. Von Eschen. Harvard. 329 pp. $29.95.

On August 1, 1956, the 84th Congress extended the terms of the President's Emergency Fund and ratified a pet project of the Eisenhower regime, the unrevealingly named Special International Program. A cold war dateline almost inevitably lends the words a sinister and clandestine aura. One can imagine the young CIA zealots who people Norman Mailer's *Harlot's Ghost* huddled in Berlin clubs or the crush bar at the opera, nursing steins of beer or glasses of *sekt* and making sophomoric puns about "SIP." The reality was both more innocent and odder, and clubs and concert halls were the appropriate setting.

In *Satchmo Blows Up the World*, Penny Von Eschen, a professor of history at the University of Michigan, describes a "can-do" bipartisan foreign policy culture in which postwar "policymakers exhibited extraordinary confidence in America's ability to shape the world in its image with whatever tools it had, be they covert operations, carpet bombing, or jazz musicians." The touch of bathos only underlines the ambiguity of American sponsorship of jazz as a propaganda instrument. Between 1956 and the late 1970s, the State Department dispatched jazz musicians to an array of Third World and Soviet bloc countries, including East Germany, Iraq and the Congo, visits that seemed to coincide with unnerving predictability with outbreaks of unrest or civil wars. The Dave Brubeck and Duke Ellington tours of 1958 and 1963, respectively, found themselves in the middle of Iraqi coups, while saxophonist Phil Woods, on a pioneering tour with the Dizzy Gillespie band, arrived in Abadan, Iran, to the smell of crude oil and the sound of gunfire over the border in what had once been a troubled corner of the British Empire.

Jazz is an art of improvisation. Even so, it's surprising to learn just how ad hoc the State Department packages apparently were. Jazz tours to the Balkans and Middle East—it's worth remembering that Ellington's *Far East Suite* was really a "Near to Middle East Suite," as the peerless Johnny Hodges solo on "Isfahan" bears out—were part of a Truman Doctrine commitment to take over anti-Communist activities from the British and to support a *cordon sanitaire*, or "perimeter defense," against Communist encroachment on a line from Turkey to Pakistan. But while the itineraries were carefully planned—and the whiff of crude detected by Woods nicely suggests the considerations involved—the exact propaganda content was not.

In her introductory chapter, "Ike Gets Dizzy," Von Eschen points to the irony of the Southerner Dwight Eisenhower, probably the last overt segregationist to occupy the White House, putting his weight behind a man whose family was driven from Cheraw, South Carolina, to Philadelphia by poverty and fear of the lynch mob. The Dizzy Gillespie band made the first government-sponsored tour of the Middle East. It was a decision that sparked outrage and envy in his old friend and fellow trumpeter Miles Davis—not, admittedly, known for his diplomatic tact—who reminded anyone who'd listen that he had run a multiracial band as early as 1949 with his "Birth of the Cool" nonet. Von Eschen crisply points out the "glaring contradiction" in State Department policy, which promoted "black artists as goodwill ambassadors...when America was still a Jim Crow nation. Indeed, the primary contradiction of promoting African American artists as symbols of a racial equality yet to be achieved would fundamentally shape the organization and ideologies of the tours."

Quite how it shaped the organization Von Eschen doesn't make entirely clear, beyond pointing up the haphazard nature of the State Department's choices, but the plural form of "ideologies" is telling. Concerned that "our successes are usually described in terms of automobiles," Eisenhower wanted to dispel the European notion that American society was driven by materialism, much as progress in the Soviet Union was measured by tractor production. To export a different idea of America, he looked to works like *Porgy and Bess*, which had already enjoyed a four-year tour in Europe, South America and the Middle East. Gershwin's plantation drama was not likely to put a color-blind face on American culture, as Eisenhower apparently (and hypocritically) desired. Then again, there seems to have been no clear consensus on what jazz represented or how it might be used to spread American values abroad.

What is more, America's "jazz ambassadors" had ideas of their own that at times challenged their sponsors' agenda. At a 1978 festival in Bombay, the saxophonist Sonny Rollins remarked that, far from being distinctively American, jazz was "really an international music" and that, as a student of Eastern philosophy and music, he was more interested in learning from other musical cultures than in imposing his own. As Rollins's comment suggests, jazz musicians were not simply passive instruments of American cold war policy, and their work increasingly showed the influence of the music they encountered abroad.

By the 1950s, jazz had made considerable strides toward establishing itself as an art music, yet the American authorities were keen to emphasize its populist credentials. When Harlem Congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr. helped organize the 1956 Gillespie tour, the State Department told him to downplay high culture in favor of "real Americana"—i.e., folklore rather than art. Ironically, in the war for hearts and minds, jazz was promoted as a "people's music" with proletarian appeal. In a similar way, Soviet cultural propaganda zigzagged between folk dancing and the Bolshoi Ballet, and between two philosophical poles (equally applicable to jazz), one asserting the freedom of the individual—or soloist, mutatis mutandis—within the ensemble, the other exalting the collective over the individual. Even when Duke Ellington made a hugely successful Soviet tour in 1971—at one point photographed with saxophonist Paul Gonsalves under a banner that read in Cyrillic script LENIN'S DIRECTIVES LIVE ON AND TRIUMPH—there were still dissident voices. Some Russians complained that while the Soviet Union sent the West Nureyev and Shostakovich, all they got in return was "jungle music" and Elvis Presley. (Nureyev, of course, rather spoiled the picture by defecting.)

The following year Boris Spassky met Bobby Fischer in Reykjavík for the world chess championship, an encounter billed on both sides (albeit with different emphases) as a confrontation between Soviet discipline and Western individualism. In fact,

Brian Morton, co-author of The Penguin Guide to Jazz on Compact Disc, *is the writer/presenter of a BBC Radio series on jazz in Poland, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.*

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Nov. 13	Sun	Day at Sea		
Nov. 14	Mon	Cabo San Lucas, Mexico	8:00 AM	4:00 PM
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Nov. 16	Wed	Puerto Vallarta, Mexico	8:00 AM	10:00 PM
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Nov. 18	Fri	Day at Sea		
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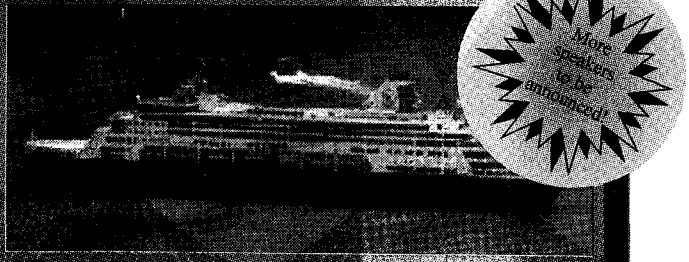

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as David Edmonds and John Eidinow point out in their recent book *Bobby Fischer Goes to War*, Spassky was a freethinking sybarite, fond of good wine and pretty women, disastrously apt to ignore his seconds, while Fischer was the chess machine.

Satchmo Blows Up the World is a fine contribution to the growing literature on the broader contours of cold war cultural politics, by scholars no longer content merely to trade on ironic puns: Coca-Colonization, the Marilyn Monroe Doctrine, Rock and Rollback. Among the best examples are Robert Haddow's *Pavilions of Plenty* (1997); Walter Hixson's *Parting the Curtain* (1997); Frances Stonor Saunders's *The Cultural Cold War* (1999); Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones's *Cloak and Dollar* (2002); and, most recently and best of all, David Caute's encyclopedic *The Dancer Defects* (2003). From these books we have gained a behind-the-scenes understanding of the economics of American secret intelligence, and of the CIA's covert sponsorship of anti-Communist cultural organizations and journals like the British *Encounter*. Perhaps the most controversial thesis, though, and the most illuminating in this context, was advanced by Serge Guilbaut in *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War* (1983). Guilbaut showed how, in CIA-funded exhibits of American art abroad, Jackson Pollock's abstract canvases were held up (like jazz) as an ideal representative of American freedom, the antithesis of Soviet Socialist Realism. The outwardly improbable association of the postwar American avant-garde and American democracy was reflected when Atlantic Records reproduced Pollock's *White Light* on the cover of Ornette Coleman's 1960 album *Free Jazz*.

Even so, it's an association that calls for a number of caveats. The younger Pollock had been a student of the rural realist Thomas Hart Benton, and he began his career in a style that might well have seemed to express American individualism. In his mature work, however, "Jack the Dripper," as *Time* magazine famously called him, showed a marked dependency on Native American spiritualism and Jungian ideas about the collective unconscious, which don't exactly square with individualism of any nationality. Those who carelessly read into Guilbaut's account a picture of Pollock plied with whiskey by men from Langley as they briefed him on Abstract Expressionism's contribution to American foreign policy ignore the fact that the process Guilbaut described only began after Pollock's death in 1956.

The Gillespie band of that year was supposed to offer a snapshot of American democracy at its most affirmative; the presence in the lineup of a female trombone player, Melba Liston (who went on to a distinguished career as an arranger), helped to evoke a society in which gender as well as color lines were vanishing. On both accounts, the suggestion was laughable, as Robert O'Meally notes in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture* (1998), a collection that also includes an important essay by the musically conservative but politically astute Stanley Crouch, "Blues to Be Constitutional: A Long Look at the Wild Wherefores of Our Democratic Lives as Symbolized in the Making of Rhythm and Tune," which explores some of the connections between jazz and democratic politics. The conundrum that Von Eschen, O'Meally and Crouch all touch on is that the marketing of American jazz as a music of democracy and freedom was confounded by American realities, not to mention the grim reality of the jazz musician's life. A similar issue applies to Willis Conover, veteran host of Voice of America's Music USA—"Time for jazz!"—which in 1955, the year before the Gillespie tour, reached an audience of 30 million in eighty countries, a figure that rose to an estimated 100 million a decade later. Conover's precise diction was an asset for an international broadcaster. Jazz fans in the Soviet bloc preferred his undogmatic approach to the clunking propaganda of Radio Free Europe.

GETTY IMAGES

Soft power ain't what it used to be.

Conover's standing as "The World's Favorite American" (the *Reader's Digest* verdict) and later as "The Man Who Brought Down Communism" wasn't challenged until October 1983, when amid a fever of expectation Miles Davis played to an estimated 5,000 Poles at the Sala Kongresowa in Warsaw, arguably the most important jazz concert ever held in the Soviet bloc. Poland had been under martial law since December 1981, and the principles of *glasnost* and *perestroika* were still some years away. On a single night, the man who had proved too much of a loose cannon for State Department sponsorship decades earlier advanced the cause of Polish liberation more than any previous visitor. The CIA's role in the visit isn't clearly known, but one former case officer told me that the Davis concert was regarded as a "hazardous success," since Miles wasn't willing to marry his instinctive resistance to totalitarianism with even a hollow endorsement of American values.

That story falls outside the scope of Von Eschen's book, but it chimes intriguingly with her title story. The cover of *Satchmo Blows Up the World* shows Louis Armstrong and his wife in Egypt, in front of the Sphinx at Giza in January 1961. Pops reaches for a high F; the great monument, emblem of the cradle of civilization for Afrocentrists, gazes back impassively. As much as he admired Armstrong, Miles recoiled from the accommodating manner that allowed him to become "Ambassador Satch." In her fine introductory chapter, Von Eschen describes how on a later visit to East Berlin, Armstrong and some of his musicians came out of their hotel to find everything closed. The trumpeter had well-attested social needs (what State Department representative Thomas Simons described, apropos an Ellington Middle East tour, as "seeking recreation in public") and insisted that they go over to the West to find a nightclub, a move technically impossible with Russian papers. The East German guards recognized "Satchmo," took his autograph and waved him on through Checkpoint Charlie. The Americans did likewise. There could be no more potent demonstration of jazz's ability to break down frontiers, and yet it was made by a man who had grown up in a South still only one generation away from Reconstruction and whose ambassadorial status had been won by his ambiguous adoption of the traditional entertainer's role.

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Von Eschen's title is an obvious play on words, lent extra weight by the recognition that Armstrong, Brubeck, Ellington and the others who followed Gillespie to the Old World and the Third World on government-sponsored tours may even have helped prevent the world from blowing up. The stories she tells are marvelous and often touching, like the one about a November 22, 1963, performance by Ellington and his band in Baghdad. Ellington and his sidemen had been told they were in a hot spot, a message ominously echoed by the sound of gunfire in the night. After the concert, they were stunned to discover that JFK had succumbed to sniper fire back home.

But what comes across even more strongly in *Satchmo Blows Up the World* is the flagrant paradox of a marginalized people sent abroad to sing the praises of the very country that marginalized them. The other fascinating aspect of the story is the one left largely untold: the impact on American musicians of musical traditions—African, European, Middle Eastern—that often seemed to share substantial common ground with the bebop and swing they were bringing to a wider world in America's name. While it's hard to measure the political impact of the State Department tours, they had a substantial influence on the musical thinking of those "jambassadors," who returned home with new rhythms and harmonies ringing in their ears. Perhaps even more than the Americanization of global culture, the enduring legacy of cold war musical diplomacy was the internationalization of jazz. ■

Game Theory

RUSSELL JACOBY

EVERYTHING BAD IS GOOD FOR YOU: How Today's Pop Culture Is Actually Making Us Smarter.
By Steven Johnson. Riverhead. 256 pp. $38.95.

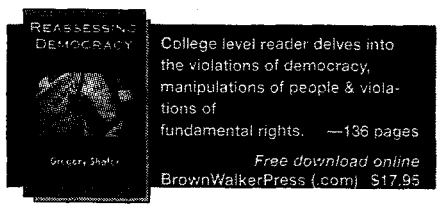
MEDIATED: How the Media Shapes Your World and the Way You Live in It.
By Thomas de Zengotita. Bloomsbury. 291 pp. $22.95.

Wander down the abandoned alleys of Trotskyism and there is no telling where you might turn up: on Main Street with contemporary neoconservatives, on campuses with respected literary critics or on the margins of the margins, where political savants probe the zeitgeist. In one of those quarters lived Josef Weber, a forgotten essayist who pondered, among other things, popular culture, which did not please him. To establish its impact, Weber in a 1957 essay posited a law of the dwindling force of cognition in bourgeois society.

Weber's law suggested that despite vast growth in scientific and technological information, knowledge of society declines. People increasingly know about things and decreasingly about social reality. Later reformulated as the law of the falling rate of intelligence, it posits that intelligence sinks in society as the production, selling and advertising of commodities rises. We face a crisis of the overproduction of idiocy. These notions represent a classic stance about the dumbing-down of popular culture. Cases in point: The most popular sporting event in the United States is the Indianapolis 500, in which nearly half a million people pay good money to watch grown men drive fast automobiles in a circle. Viewers by the millions follow contestants on reality television as they compete to eat bugs and worms.

Steven Johnson, a savvy writer on technology and its pleasures, offers a thoroughgoing challenge to this bleak outlook on popular culture. To be sure, Johnson's contrariness may be a pose, inasmuch as it depends on opposition that has all but melted away. Apart from a few depressed followers of Josef Weber and his ilk, who today believes in falling cognition? Champions of popular culture can be found throughout this broad land. One need not venture very far to discover courses on soap operas, situation comedies or *Star Trek* offered by cultural studies professors, who wax about the profundity of television. To be sure, doubt about the legitimacy of their subject matter haunts even the most avid boosters of popular culture. I sometimes ask my students a variant of an Internet

Russell Jacoby, a professor of history at UCLA, is the author of The Last Intellectuals, Dialectic of Defeat *and other works. His new book,* Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought for an Anti-Utopian Age, *has just been published by Columbia University Press.*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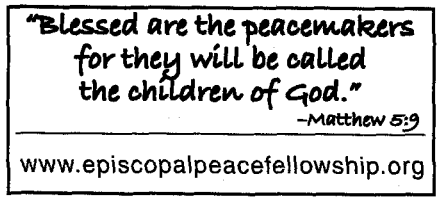

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dating question: Whom would you rather date, someone who indicates their favorite pastime is to stay home to play video games or to step out to a ballet or museum? Even the most avid enthusiasts of television balk at dating their soul mates.

In *Everything Bad Is Good for You*, Johnson tells a "progressive story," in which popular culture, far from dumbing us down, becomes ever more complex, intellectually stimulating and sophisticated each year. He recalls that his father partook of an intricate game of simulated professional baseball in which one mastered endless data in order to field teams. While this game required dice, cards and graphs, Johnson Jr. grew up on video games, which serve as the touchstone for his argument. For Johnson these games and kindred television programs require an ability to command mountains of information and characters. They are not easy to play or enjoy; they call for patience and intelligence. Aficionados study guidebooks and cheat sheets. The most debased forms of mass diversion—video games and violent television dramas and juvenile sitcoms—turn out to be nutritional after all. Neither the masses nor the mass media are getting dumber. "The exact opposite is happening: the culture is getting more intellectually demanding, not less."

Johnson worships the god of complexity, but it may prove a false idol. He makes much of the new complexity, not simply of video games—the transition from a simplistic Pac-Man to an intricate Grand Theft Auto—but of television programs and films. Old shows like *Dragnet* consisted of a single narrative structure with two or three lead characters and ended decisively. New shows like *The Sopranos* juggle numerous characters and maintain an ongoing story. Johnson even offers a spatial graph of the Fox series *24* to demonstrate that it's at least three times as complex as the old *Dallas*. These shows presumably demand increasing attention from the viewer, who must recall previous episodes and follow multiple story lines. Although the trend is not so evident, films too have become increasingly complicated. Johnson compares *Star Wars*, with ten characters, to *Lord of the Rings*, with almost thirty. He suggests that new children's films such as *Toy Story* and *Shrek* present much more intricate paths than earlier ones like *Mary Poppins* and *Bambi*.

Johnson's argument is not quite as contrived as it appears. He limits his thesis to narrow cognitive and mental skills that may increase due to gaming, television and Internet surfing. He makes a halfhearted stab at giving a scientific confirmation of his belief that popular culture and its customers are becoming smarter, but he often writes in the comfortably vague style of "studies have shown." He appeals to evidence of rising IQs over the decades, based on the work of an American philosopher named James Flynn, which supposedly rebuts any notion of dwindling cognition in society.

Yet the idea that IQ scores are rising remains contested; and even if it were true, it is not clear what its causes are or—more important—what its consequences are. Hence when Johnson tells us that "moderately intelligent people today are much smarter" than "moderately intelligent people were a hundred years ago," we moderately intelligent might wonder what this means. True, many of us today can simultaneously drive a car, talk on a cell phone, shuffle music CDs and sip coffee, which a denizen of a century ago would find bewildering. But is this a measure of intelligence? Does it have any bearing on knowledge of self and society? Not in the least.

This is the rub about the complexity argument: how complex is complexity? Or, more precisely, does an ability to master complex narratives and intricate games reflect an expansion of general intelligence? It's odd that Johnson's paean to the impact of mass media nowhere mentions "attention-deficit disorder," which has only been recognized as a syndrome by the American Psychiatric Association since 1980. Whatever its medical basis, the syndrome would seem a revealing counterpoint to media complexity: Many people today cannot focus on one thing for long. "Complex" television programs with ten characters and six plots may respond to this phenomenon; something is always happening, unlike a simple narrative, which might require a willingness or ability to stick to one story. Johnson half knows this, and late in his book he qualifies his thesis: The new complex intelligence does not foster a capacity to follow the "sustained" argument of a typical book. Johnson must make this concession—after all, he offers us an argumentative book, not a blog or a video game.

However, the concession hardly salvages his thesis. Today's media may require skills that stand in no relationship to an aptitude to think about the world. It's hardly news that many Americans command vast amounts of information about automobiles and sports, and just a few hazy facts about society. My own basketball pals can talk with ardor and knowl-

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edge about an army of ball players, coaches, high school prospects, old games and new, salaries and draft choices, but few of them address politics with any comparable expertise. Media complexity may express the dwindling force of cognition in the era of attention-deficit disorder.

If Johnson trumpets the new media, Thomas de Zengotita questions it. De Zengotita believes that the media have "mediated" life to the point that we no longer know, or care about, the difference between reality and its representation. "We have been consigned to a new plane of being engendered by mediating representations of fabulous quality and inescapable ubiquity." If this sounds portentous, de Zengotita generally is not: "Ask yourself this: is there anything you do that remains essentially unmediated, anything you don't experience reflexively through some commodified representation of it? Birth? Marriage? Illness?" For de Zengotita we live in a period where reality and representation, or things and their sheen, blur. Everything seems to flow and merge, a world of endless choices, crystallized in the expression "whatever." We watch fake reality TV and live real fake lives.

De Zengotita, who teaches at a progressive private school in New York City, has a good eye for life's foibles in an age of surfeit. At a school event in which political clubs made presentations, seventy-five adults showed but only a few students. An indignant woman arose, a 1960s veteran, to lambaste the lack of "opportunities" at a "school like this" for "our students to bring their concerns to the community." Wrong, as de Zengotita realized. There were not too few but too many opportunities.

We have entered the period of "niche commitments" and politics, he writes. "It was that evening that I first grasped the dialectic of 'whatever.'" At another panel, a speaker let drop that he had attended an "Advocacy Institute." De Zengotita wondered, "Advocacy of what?" The speaker replied, "Anything."

De Zengotita breezes through subjects such as television, movies, adolescence and parenting, and he sometimes sounds like Johnson with a caveat. The transition from *Leave It to Beaver* or *Father Knows Best* to *The Simpsons*, he writes breathlessly, says "so much" about the "new millennium." In *The Simpsons*, anarchy reigns. We are no longer "charmed" by children as they "slowly learn to make sense of a world that does, in fact, make sense. Because it doesn't. The world of *The Simpsons* is chaos."

Unfortunately, de Zengotita has an eye for media excess and excess media, but not much more. *Mediated* consists of loosely connected vignettes and observations punctuated by epiphanies de Zengotita experienced during panels or watching television. To the extent he has an argument, his best chapter, on "The Cult of the Child," bears little relationship to it, which de Zengotita coolly admits. The sanctification of children seems "to sit strangely" amid a society of mediation, where everything is about choices and representation. "But mediation is nothing if not a fount of paradox. No need to make the factual case" about the cult of the child. With this approach one could also take up Bush's foreign policy or the health insurance crisis as instances of media mediation, which de Zengotita almost does. He rants about Bush but does not get beyond telling us that the President belongs to the "age of mediation" while pretending he doesn't.

De Zengotita's best and worst case for his argument may be his own book. It's not clear whether *Mediated* is a real book or a knockoff; whether it is written in English or a facsimile. It reads like a magazine piece on uppers, and parts of it did appear in *Harper's Magazine*. "Ah those iPods," runs a typical passage. "Plato would have flipped out. Which bring us to attitude." So it goes for several hundred pages. "But enough politics. Let's have fun instead. Here's one of my favorite examples.... I'll never forget—it was during the Christmas season of 1999, during those heady dot-com days, and Jeff Bezos was sharing his vision with the masses in a TV interview.... Bezos saith...." Or this: "I hate to be a drag, but, have you noticed? Movie endings are getting lamer and lamer lately, especially in the action/sci-fi/scary area." Ironically it's Johnson, the champion of the mass media, who has written an old-fashioned book; the putative detractor, de Zengotita, offers us the literary equivalent of Post-its.

The critic Dwight Macdonald befriended the German refugee Josef Weber, perhaps because of a shared suspicion of the culture industry. "Those who consume Masscult," Macdonald wrote more than forty years ago, "might as well be eating ice cream sodas, while those who fabricate it are no more expressing themselves than are the stylists, who design the latest atrocity from Detroit." The day for sweeping denunciations of popular culture like these is obviously over, probably for the better. The vision of media complexity and profundity, however, that pervades Johnson's and de Zengotita's books may represent not simply an advance—a new sophistication—but an old conformism. ■

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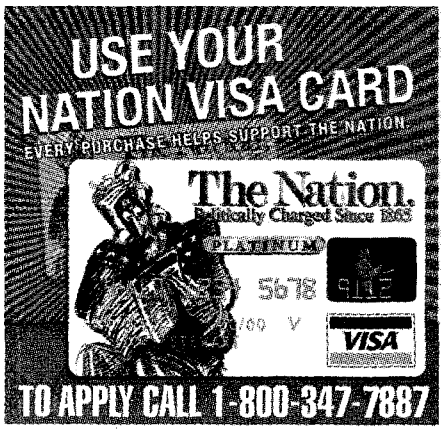

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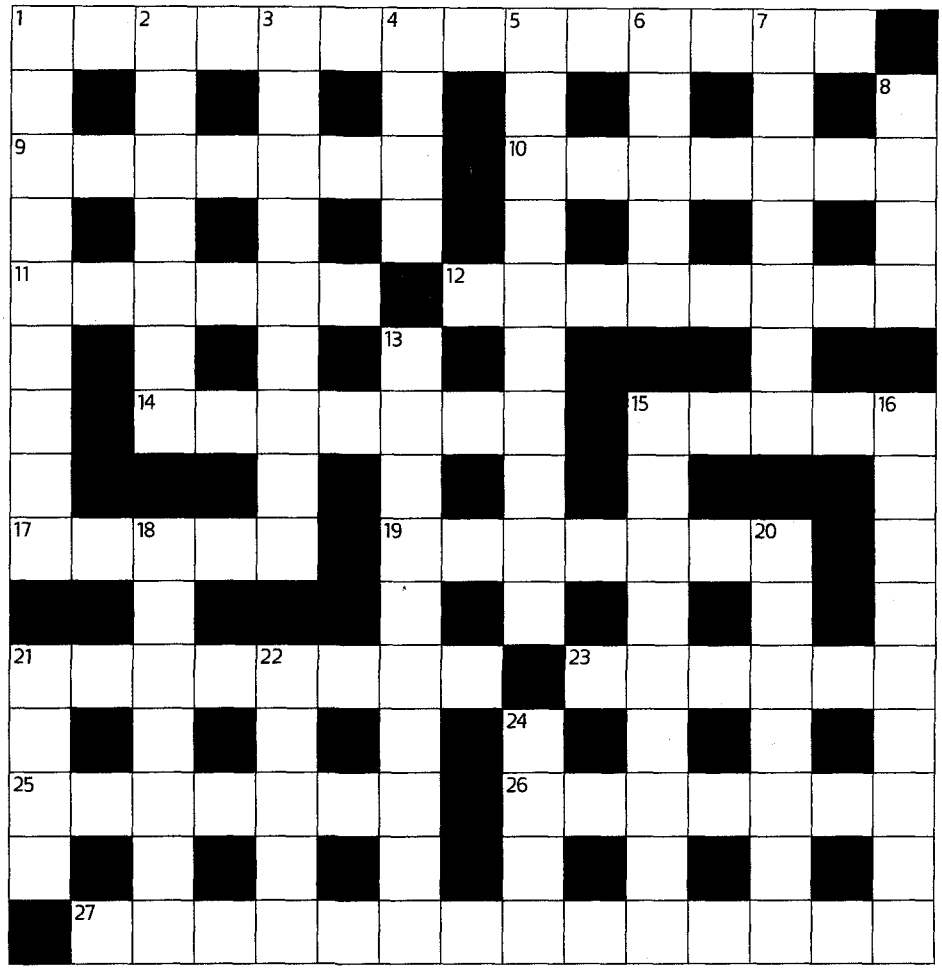

ACROSS

1 One can legally do so, at some corners—as one might on coming home. (4,2,3,5)

9 Was Quasimodo typical of them, and others selected because they are unusually capable, which may not be completely fair? (7)

10 One might be, in putting it on, if the weather turns warm. (7)

11 and **23** Things that hold pearls get pawned this way, being in a battle-weary position. (5-7)

12 Evidently what supplies water is finished, and accomplished perfectly. (4-4)

14 I put on a sort of it, which is ideal! (7)

15 There is nothing (just as you found it) like a good spot in time of trouble. (5)

17 Soldiers might be expected to do it right, when in the army. (5)

19 The X film might, and you get scolded for it! (7)

21 Once in this, you're rare, they say, though it appears more than once a month. (4,4)

23 See 11

25 Tom, and what one might do with a long line found in the seafood market, perhaps... (7)

26 ...and Tom in Paris, allowed back with personal property. (7)

27 Laurence Sterne was responsible for it, but Teddy Roosevelt got to sit awkwardly with a modern team nearby. (8,6)

DOWN

1 Completely beat, which is not new, while making an entrance. (9)

2 Our Dean of poetry? (7)

3 Doesn't pay any attention to what some places at Grand Canyon are called. (9)

4 Hardy girl sets out this way. (4)

5 They're on the Atlantic side, being considered dudes by some of their opposite numbers. (10)

6 I pass out cards, which suggests it should be perfect. (5)

7 Perhaps describing active uranium cores where lack of age may be the driving force. (3,4)

8 Perhaps give a push and a shove. (4)

13 Right out of the middle, it would be a large annoyance instead of one who is supposed to be watching you all the *time*. (3,7)

15 One who manipulates people, perhaps offering soap to the troubled. (9)

16 What's the point to puns and such if it means you may be trying to stick someone! (9)

18 Not quite equal to a high point, being a middling band. (7)

20 One who may live where his habitat proves it's far to go, and OK at making this. (7)

21 In Northern England, how you may call a current flow. (4)

22 Dismal start, possibly, to lose a number of young ladies. (5)

24 Part of the disc a man offers, as a way to take you in. (4)

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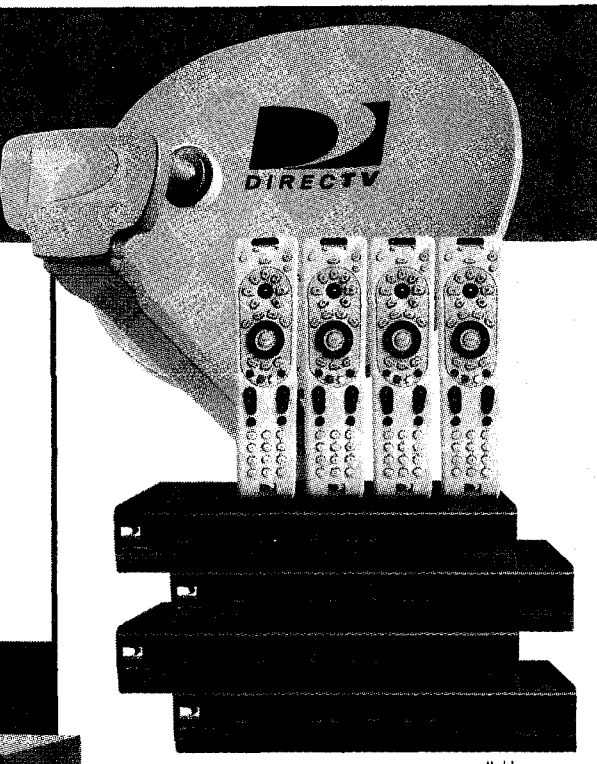

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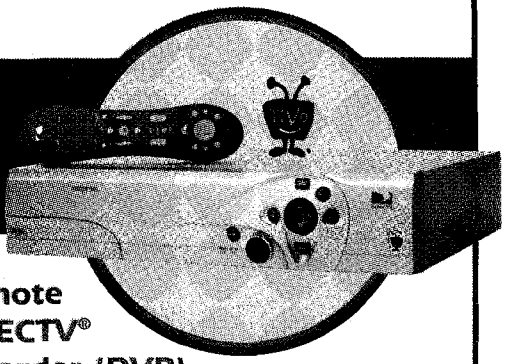

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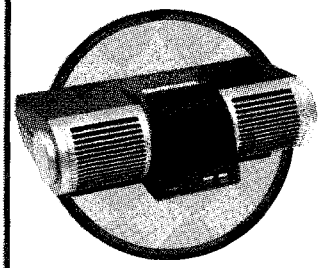

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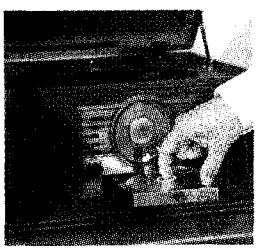

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